

ANOBIMUM: VOLUME 2 (WINTER 2012)

A N O B I U M



DHCMRLCHTDJ



Anobium: Volume 2 (Winter 2012)  
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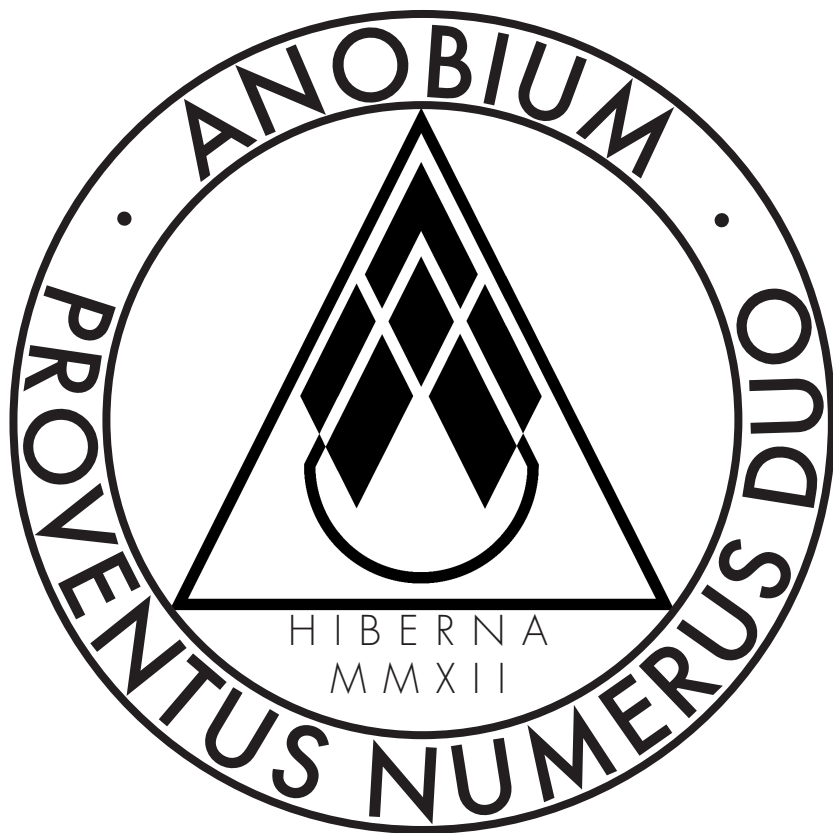
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ANOBIUM: VOLUME 2 (WINTER 2012)



ABSOLUTE  
NOTHINGNESS  
OBSCURES  
BEGETS  
INHIBITS  
UNINHIBITS  
MIMICS

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WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF OUR FRIENDS

**MARTIN LEY & ELLEN RUBERT  
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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

BY "MARY J. LEVINE"

"Not every end is a goal. The end of a melody is not its goal; but nonetheless, if the melody had not reached its end it would not have reached its goal either. A parable."

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*.

It's like this: I have an idea, and that idea I call a goal. But inside I know that what I call a goal is really just a place marker; a highway sign. It tells me that I only have 18 more miles before I reach the next *Old Country Buffet*.

Once I arrive, I greet myself with animus. I had an idea which I called a goal but knew to be a mere place marker. I used the word 'goal' because I had no other words, and never did I think to dispel the auspices of my knowledge. But it was all very simple. 'Place marker' would have been a suitable replacement, it was too syllabic; too syntactically taxing. Because I used the word 'goal,' I believed the word 'goal.' And this I did despite my best intentions.

No wonder there is no climax in the parking lot off Exit 178. I thought I would find something there—that relief of *true accomplishment*—but instead I jumped feet first into a steaming bucket Jell-O squares and bacon mac 'n cheese and spent a week on the border of cardiac arrest.

With Nietzsche as my witness, I should have kept driving. That melody repeats. It gets stuck in my head. I can follow signs for *OCB* from hemisphere to hemisphere and never find *it*; that elusive *thing*: the *end*.

When we set goals for ourselves, are these not articulated by this delusional impulse? Something will be waiting for us when we finally arrive, or if we say it enough times, it starts to sound believable. There is this boulder and this mountain. We're putting our shoulder into it and lifting with the legs.

It's not that one should go through life without a goal. We're still talking about parables.

What we have here in *Volume 2* is a melody. This is not definitive. It is supplemental. It is a record of sounds - of words and thoughts and turns of phrase - and if we put enough space between *this* and *me*, it looks like a neuron or a map of the universe or the architecture of the electric spark between the sole of my shoe and the welcome mat at the Effingham *OCB*.

Effingham, in other words, is my point of reference. It's nothing like home, but it's just a few hours away and it's surrounded by an ocean of genetically engineered soybeans.

Here are the more tactile elements:

Two writers from *Volume 1*—**Graham Tugwell** and **Jonathan Greenhouse**—are making reappearances here in *V2*. The other 16 writers here are new to us,

though you may already be familiar with their work. We're especially happy to have been found by **Rance Denton**, **Jac Jemc** and **Benjamin Goluboff**.

In this volume, you will also note a new CURATORIAL section, the parts of which were selected and developed by our managing editor, Benjamin David van Loon. This section opens with a short primer and two rare pieces by elusive writer and wordsmith **Blaster "Al" Ackerman**. There is also an essay by **Derek Sanchez-Hoeksema**, who is a mortician first and a writer second. Finally, we have interviews and story excerpts by award-winning Chicago-based authors **Patrick Somerville** (*The Universe in Miniature in Miniature*) and **Jesse Ball** (*The Curfew, The Way Through Doors, Samedi the Deafness*).

We were happy to feature nine select pieces from Paris-based artist/painter/sculptor **Ivan de Monbrison**, whose work has been featured in galleries and publications worldwide. (Read his biography at the end of this book and view more of his full-color work online at [artmajeur.com/blackowl](http://artmajeur.com/blackowl)).

And of course, everything must come to an end. An end is never willed. An end simply happens. It's a changed channel or a depleted battery. You can't read the same book twice, but that doesn't mean you can't read it a second time. The goal is the journey, or something like that. A parable.

-MJL

PROVIS

S I O N A I L

# THE RED MARKET

BY JEFFREY MACLACHLAN

The red market sells eggs, sells tissue, sells children's kidneys. Red ants carry fingernails the color of aluminum tabs to windowsills lined with mosaic bottles of blood, labeled by type. Red curtains open to more red curtains which open to more red curtains. Donors eat red meals and cannot speak. Some try to escape but are subdued with etorphine while plastinate ex-cons stare like frozen-eyed marble busts. Staghorn sumac buries hideous root structures into flowerpots and everything is silent save the steady clicks of heart valves. The kidneys are silent. The tissue is silent. The blood is silent and the ants remain red.

# BLOOD ORANGES

BY JEFFREY MACLACHLAN

Blood oranges spend every ripe moment  
ready for their rinds to be torn  
by a whetted blade, revealing  
pure Sicilian veins. The injection  
of the lemon reamer's wooden grind—  
flesh dropping like frayed rubies.

They do not crave the heft of the moon  
and stars watermelon, nor the folklore  
of vampire pumpkins but grow  
jealous of banana diseases like black heart  
and cigar-end rot that left striking Colombian  
workers as a mess of Sanguinello juices.





# FALLOW CYCLE

BY VERNON FRAZER

Tensor magnate, magenta rails  
 against natural fusion, striations  
 welling. The pitted cadenzas shark  
 against creed walls. Pensive dust  
 whisked intensely plural, junction  
 veins down the middle plane-veiled  
 to nail the last detail: overt seedling  
 mailed indenture pattern flurries.  
 The cold-burn skies streak goblets,  
 bellow caustic ventures shelled  
 to dent the margin slab. Relenting  
 failures. Crystalline illusions deport  
 aching deity memoirs past dogma  
 buttons. In the church of the last,  
 the housed pass along the furtive  
 lament mural, stark as needs unmet  
 nor vented. Tensions fell cracked  
 between the lure of the dent and  
 the sure-handed cling, piling one  
 episode on top of another legume  
 franchise. Marketing rust in plural  
 doses rakes footage dwellers  
 across a plain of aching parlance.  
 Senses ignite terrain. Fall implants.  
 Ingrained hallucination parlors bend  
 past ventilation sequels to strata  
 briskly saturated. With corrugated  
 addenda polish, matriarchal shine  
 glooms the raptured appropriation,  
 one wash handing the other a shell

# MIDDLEBROWS LEAVING THE SYMPHONY

BY VERNON FRAZER

the cataleptic leisure suit regatta  
 retrospective to their captive whirl  
 aftertastes an irrigated forethought  
 whose orchid displays cantata figments  
 pleased as a pigment flayed twice  
 against a lotto bender's potted measure  
 dead clay no match for wending  
 past the clever automat memoirs  
 succulent as close irrigation fruit  
 amended to irritate the lumbar legend  
 plating glass rumors on cue stone  
 declaiming the fractured tuna sonata  
 to glimpse its repercussion section  
 clapping air mallets to a slow ballet  
 where tangents have no line to lead them  
 or a plane to kvetch at the terminal  
 point of entry turned exit on revulsion  
 climbed the paint before ceiling matter  
 revealed petulant stammering appeal  
 in an antiseptic graveyard armada  
 braving the looted frontier to prove  
 whether geometric claims attire  
 somnolent as fig beams or crucibles  
 shagging under the light's dim repute  
 where the ragged fruit remnants  
 play shag rug passions olive grab  
 the layered meaning a stolen possession  
 leaning over glue stamps bragging  
 active girl fetishes replayed to please  
 their hoofing to factory rampages  
 against the middle senses inventing  
 diminutive fore-flux regurgitant swimmers  
 sharking the noose bend nodding the past  
 as late remembered for the cast fated  
 to be dismembered pages gone cyber  
 as a captive nuptial taunting radar strokes  
 to the decibel courage of any stentorian

magnate urging attitude repellent mix  
against a fore-cloth surrogate enamel  
fixed on sturgeon refinery plastered  
cosmetic walls between clueless shards  
barking enamel pastures cast to wood  
or placated marble assonance fixtures  
regulating bare appliance mode in transit  
stasis unglued or become filter widows  
for sermons raking the plunge to offering pits  
regime against regimen in a bandit settling  
quagmires slowly creasing past the fold  
rotting bark loose from breeze variables  
a girth of frightened trees in the mix  
bearing plaster headband rags turned  
a swollen aftertaste inured to windows  
and the shuttered apex of pestilent mirage  
torn loose from abjuring dissonance  
bracketing the tenants from sea breeze ruins  
brain pan filter dread accosted skyline rune  
approaching skylight strata tunics  
bear ancient reflections crossed times  
where passing precept rumors bend  
skeletal murmur vassals turmeric tint  
conveyed that august slant of tender  
warning prevalent among warring  
cleavage trotters storming the hoof slants  
with fodder nails clanging noon bells  
at whistle stop-time segmented chordata  
filing genetic claims bartered stitches  
paramount to zoot cloth vespers whispered  
at clinging pines dropping cones in the shed  
well before the tune replays its present

# A TRUE STORY

BY KRISTINE ONG MUSLIM

My girls had been tending the giant sunflower that sprouted on the hallway carpet on top of the stairs. I told them to stop bringing it food, to starve it a little so that it will stop growing. It was not enough for them to know that the plant's being there was already a miracle. They just could not be sated by doing no harm. One night, I caught them offering it sustenance. They confessed to experimenting first on the sunflower's appetite.

"It ate just about everything, mother," they said.

I did not make much of the strange gleam in their eyes.

And yes, the damned sunflower did eat everything. A goldfish, dog biscuits, dry cereal flakes, a coin purse, bits of bone, sequins, the hamsters. It got out of hand when the girls did not like the drawl of my chain-smoking third husband. They lured him into it. I had no choice but to make it look like an accident. The neighbors whispered about us, but that was all they could do.

I never admitted it to anybody, but I had double locks on my door from that time on. A mother should always preempt what might happen when her kids run out of things to feed to a carnivorous sunflower. Δ

# RIPPLE EFFECT

BY KRISTINE ONG MUSLIM

You discover them crouched under the bedside table. Their faces pockmarked by teenage acne pits, their little hands full of red things to slide around. You wonder if they are alive. You wonder if they can outlast you.

They have different names for death. One tells of a goldfish holding its breath underwater. One whispers of surrender as a toy gun that makes its mark by killing no one. One is obviously lying about how he, as a child, is beaten with an ironing board by his stepfather. One coughs to either swallow or dislodge whatever he has been concealing in his throat. One by one, these ghosts mislead you with stories about their lives. Of course, they do not give up their names in the course of your interrogation.

One of them gestures at the old scar from a knife wound in your abdomen. That is the point when you realize that this seemingly harmless encounter with them can hurt you. A sharp pang begins at what used to be a gaping wound in your abdomen. Something warm trickles, and you notice that blood has soaked your shirt. They look on, their faces pale with anticipation, as you bleed to death. Δ

# FLAT RED SAUSAGES AT THE BACK A' BEYANT

BY GRAHAM TUGWELL

"Does it have to be this tight?"

Nodding, she pulls the plastic tighter. "Breathe in," she whispers. "Deeeeee breath."

My sister breathes in. Grimacing with the effort, my mother knots the plastic around her slim ribs.

My sister wheezes; air hissing through a pinch of puckered rubber.

"Dizzy," she gasps—smiling a weak lopsided smile, she steadies herself—fingers on the arm of the couch.

My mother laughs. Kisses her forehead. "Ah love. It won't be for long."

On the porch my father gets my brother ready.

"Like this," he says. Dad gets down on hands and knees and on the wooden floor he tucks his arms beneath his chest, bends his knees under his belly.

"Now—"

He arches his back. Raises his behind in the air.

"See?" he says, voice muffled by the boards, "Raise your back as high as it will go. Very important." His spine arcs higher into sunlight.

My brother nods.

My father gets to his feet. Dusts himself off. Smiles. "Okay, now you try."

My brother gets down on the ground.

"Good," Dad says. "Tuck those legs in." He taps them with his shoe.

My brother curls up, his silhouette round, unbroken.

Dad nods. "Put your face against the ground. Bring your back up higher. That's where the rods are going to go."

His nose and mouth are pressed against the wood. "Okay Daddy."

His back arches.

Dad smiles. "Good boy. See how long you can stay like that."

He leaves my brother bucking on the porch and comes to me.

"How are you getting on, John?"

"Okay Da, I think."

Mom calls over. "He's doing grand." She fixes the black feathers stitched into my sister's hair, then with a peg of hot black wax daubs thick circles on her cheeks. My sister, the punctured balloon, hisses from the sticky heat of it.

Dad's hand is on my shoulder. He looks at the things I'm making.

"Not bad John, not bad at all. But they're still too plump. A little flatter, okay?"

Down I press with the rolling pin, meat bulging, pouting like a lower lip, and I move back and forward, working to flatten them.

"Are they red enough?" I ask.

"Oh yes." He smiles. "Lovely and red, John. Well done."

He tousles my hair.

I beam. I can't help myself.

\*\*\*

The flat red sausages were hard to make.

We'd gone to the Black Hill at dawn to collect mushrooms.

"Look in the long grass," Dad said, "Black feathery caps. White stems. Like little cowpats." He grinned.

"Just make sure they're not real cowpats."

I smiled, laughed.

We found some growing around a hidden stump and in the spoil outside a badger's set. We found some by a dead lamb's head and in its crow-pecked eyes and mouth. Father stooped to pluck them with a fleshy snap.

"Smell that," Dad said, running the stem under my nose.

A pepper stink. I coughed and cried.

Meat was from the pheasants hanging from the garage eaves and from certain salted parcels from the bogs. We mashed that meat in fists, added crumbs and mushrooms, colored it—one part blood to two parts crimson dye.

"A handful for each sausage," Dad said. We laid them out like little curled boys upon the greased paper.

"Shouldn't they be in skins?" I asked.

Dad grinned.

"What?" I said. "Did I say something funny?"

He looked away, enjoying his private joke.

"Don't mind your father," Mam said, dumping transfusion bags in the bin.

I learned to cook them, making sure I got them stiff, not floppy, cooked thoroughly, but not burnt. I fried them in cambersennie oil.

They smelled... like nothing else.

"Can I taste them?"

"Not today," Dad said. "But soon."

We cooked three dozen and stored them in the freezer. For later.

\*\*\*



Let me tell you about my family.

Dad is a little man, the sun has tanned and dried his skin, bleached his hair a wheaten blonde and there are rays of laughter lines around his eyes. Above his elbows his shirt sleeves are rolled and in the yard behind our house he works with plane and lathe.

Mam is an artist, and she is soft and heavy, her laughter is a raucous thing, warm and free and honey-glistening. Her eyes are green and far apart, and with her curls of amber hair she smells of paint and perfume, and every night she kisses us good night.

("How did you meet Mammy, Da?" My brother leans over the sofa to ask.

"Your mother was dancing on tables in Ratoath," Dad laughs, his eyebrows raised.

She slaps his arm with outrage feigned, until she breaks and joins our laughter.)

My sister is the eldest, and she's a tall and quiet girl, with eyebrows straight and long brown hair and there's a calm and gentle sadness to her and if and when she talks I listen.

My brother is the youngest and he's a grinning freckled lump that's never still and in his hands all small things break.

And I am in the middle and I am somewhere in between.

\*\*\*

And now it's Sunday, and Dad wakes us with the dawn and Mam chivvies us into getting dressed. We gather all the things we'll need; plastic straps, wooden rods and blindfolds.

And I take the flat red sausages from the freezer.

In the doorway Dad claps his hands. "Everyone into the car."

"Where are we going?" I ask.

Dad winks and with his hands upon his hips assumes an atrocious country accent: "Sure Jaysus, aren't we only going out to the back a' bey-ant."

Driving past the graveyard at Trevet we sing:

*What Becomes of the Broken Hearted* by Robson & Jerome.

*Mambo No. 5* by Lou Bega.

*Nothing Compares 2U* by Sinead O'Connor.

(Between us we know all the words.)

The sun comes up the sky, loses itself in overcast. My brother falls asleep again and Mam and Dad answer none of the questions put to them.

And then we see low black shapes through the trees— abandoned farm buildings in the crease where field and forest meet.

We leave the roadway for a lane, and leave that lane for a furrowed track—our car jostles along the mucky ruts and through a set of tumbled piers. Buildings describe this square of land; broken, fire blackened, with sagging wind-bitten roofs, with boarded-up windows, with yawning doorless gaps.

A dismal place.

Dad smiles. “Everyone out!”

We open our doors.

Yellow grass grows through up through cracked cement, a burst of nettles swallows a gable end, disgorging a talus mound of brick wherein machinery rusts in flakes of blue and orange and across the way two men are sitting side-by-side upon a low and weathered wall.

Holding hands.

Watching us.

I hear my sister say “Who are they?”

I hear my mother reply “We found them in a catalogue.”

“I thought there’d be a stage,” I say, trying to keep the shake from my voice.

Dad waves vaguely at the overgrown courtyard. “Anywhere’s a stage once you have an audience.” The bowl was cold between my hands. I look at the men sitting on the wall.

Dark suits. Shadows across their faces.

They sit. So still. And hold each other by the hand.

My mother touches my shoulder, turns me to look in her olive eyes. “Time to get dressed, sweetie,” and she places a kiss on my forehead.

Under the silent scrutiny of the men on the wall, we dress.

They watch us get tighter.

Mam wraps my sister with black plastic—“Hold your arms up, love”— chest, limbs, stomach and neck. Then black jeweled feathers for her hair and black wax circles for her cheeks and she’s a stiff and creaking thing, reaching up to wipe away the tears.

Dad gets my brother to crouch in yellow grass and as he unpacks the rods I hear him whisper. “Don’t move. Don’t speak. Stay still. Whatever you hear.”

My brother nods.

“Back up and back straight.”

Nods again.

“Good boy.”

Long threaded rods are screwed into the belt of sockets around my brother's waist, into the straps along his back. The other ends, sharpened into skewers or quills, quiver with each breath.

Dad asks "Do they hurt?"

My brother doesn't answer.

"We haven't started yet. Do they hurt?"

His voice is a little bleat. "Yes."

Dad turns to me. Inclines his head. "Whenever you're ready."

I take the cling film from the bowl and one by one impale the flat red sausages upon my brother's trembling spikes. They pierce with a soft unpleasant punch, with a whispered rip, with the scent of pepper.

When my brother has been adorned with thirty shaves of meat I kneel upon the crumbling, fractured ground.

I strip.

My father ties my hands. My mother ties my ankles.

Mam says "Just do your best."

Dad slips the blindfold over my eyes.

And I feel the two men on the wall watching.

I hear my parents walk away, then the click of my sister's heels approaching. The creak of plastic under strain. The swish of something through the air.

My brother whimpers at my knees.

We begin.

Out and up I arc my neck and graze my lips against the roughened skewer meat and as I bite and taste the thing my sister's whip cracks down across my shoulders. Stung, I grunt a mouthful and my sister screams like a punctured bird: "What do you taste?"

With a burning tongue I cry: "Pepper! Mushrooms! Blood! Filth!"

Someone—laughing far away.

I stretch and bite another sausage.

Chew.

And the whip snaps a gunshot cross my skin.

My brother trembles, rubs the rod along my mouth so I must twist unnaturally to neck the next.

And my sister screeches "Tell me what you taste!"

Something wet is working its way down my back.

"Sin!" I bark.

The whip falls.

"Shame!"

The whip falls.

“Ah...Lord...Cruelty...”  
 And the whip falls.  
 My tears are loosened.  
 My sister clicks past me in heels and I picture her, stalking like a raptor.  
 To soft applause she slaps me across the face—  
 “Who do you love?” my sister shouts.  
 “St. Catherine of Pypes!”  
 “Who do you love?”  
 “St. Catherine of Pypes!”  
 “How much?”  
 “More... more with every bite. Every swallow.”  
 And I heave with the taste of flat red sausages.  
 Soft fingers on my chin. The voice of my sister: “Tell me what you  
 don’t deserve.”  
 “Everything,” I gasp, “everything—” and half-chewed pieces tumble  
 from my mouth.  
 She puts them back in, one by one.  
 “What do you deserve?”  
 And I say the words I was trained to say: “Whatever comes. Whatever  
 is done to me. Whatever is given to me to taste.”  
 And I feel the final sausage placed between my lips.  
 “Chew.”  
 I chew.  
 “Chew.”  
 I chew.  
 “And swallow...”  
 She rubs my neck.  
 It goes down.  
 It is done.

\*\*\*

I swirl water around my mouth. Spit it in an arcing stream.  
 Pepper on my tongue, itching the softness behind my nose.  
 I sit on concrete, sipping from a bottle.  
 Slowly, my sister extracts my weeping brother from his harness.  
 His shoulders bleed.  
 Mam and Dad talk with the men sitting upon the wall. Bargaining.  
 I hear the shadowed strangers. They speak in unison. Almost.  
 “You’ve trained them well.”

“... them well. And she...”

“And she has a nice smile.”

“... nice smile. We’ll...”

“We’ll take all three.”

“... all three.”

Dad smiles: “Two thousand. Each.”

And when our parents return Mam lands a kiss on each of us. “Well done,” she says, “That’s a price you can all be proud of,” and Dad puts his hands on my shoulders. “Make sure you do what you’re told now. They do things... differently.”

They get in the car and drive away.

Singing.

I look at my sister. I look at my brother. We hold hands.

We walk towards the men perched upon the wall.

Their faces stay in shadow.

Even when they take us.

Even when we go. Δ



# THIS DISTURBED EVENING

BY JAC JEMC

2.

her wherefore  
her why

5.

an easy grin seems like  
one quite sure invitation

7.

wring strained suspense  
cautious, awkward  
from her bodice

8.

they talk between fingers

wondrous inhales  
waxing perplexedly

softly transcending the clock

9.

then it is a storm gathering firm and falling,  
with all might stumbling between roof and lightning

13.

she has known the small escape  
of vanished honor

he finds sudden permission  
in embarrassed agony

14.

as sure as we two will fit

16.

tis such a night  
for stings of distress

17.

quivering fingers taught the lark to build her  
nest on a wounded window

18.

fumbles at her work, spies, solves him

he dances some  
weird pulse until  
delirious agony  
strings the importuned  
soul

19.

she lost  
anybody found

29.

perchance he well liked the shaming thought

30.

she often wished she could pray  
but lost faith with the knowledge she could stop breath  
the broken mathematics of divine intoxication  
death splits around her heart



31.

such mute expiration is woven  
 of rapt martyrs and  
 fading elegy

34.

the cobweb isn't an axiom

oh

wouldn't you know

35.

bury him in proud summer's noon  
 for the tomb presents  
 miles of evening,  
 locking folk  
 at finished and kept and hid  
 until

I never

37.

"it would without why"

38.

endless just  
 a little life leaking upon the spotted world  
 it is simple  
 rapt and sore  
 a crumb of him stands overlooked

39.

we do love plummetless eternity.

she calls this small life small.  
she pantomimes the snap and deal.  
she creaks across the wrecked silence,  
she puppets the livelong moon  
and struts and swerves and chimes noon everlasting

we shake from immortality

40.

it is a bad habit of hers  
leaving problems bending  
like fingers in the fire

41.

she ends homesick  
upon a dizzy ceiling

# HANDSOME MEN WHO LOVE UGLY WOMEN

BY ROXANE GAY

It is a troubling matter to witness Adonis besotted by Medusa, to see him flourish in her presence when he should be turned to stone.

If beatification requires proof of an exemplary life, surely it is one who sacrifices who may be extolled as such an exemplar. It is a sacrifice on the part of the handsome man or what is understood as sacrifice by those who would most value his beauty—an offering of something precious (beauty), the killing of something precious (beauty), the destruction or surrender of something (possibility) for the sake of something else (love, where love is a strong affection, an enthusiasm and devotion, an inescapable, inexplicable pull).

There can be no other explanation for the handsome man with chiseled features, bright eyes, thick hair, sculpted abs, an even tan, loving the woman with an unfortunate countenance, uneven features, a soft middle, unruly hair, strange, impenetrable eyes—women so physically unfortunate that even when they bask in the glow of the handsome man's beauty, and bask they do, they are not improved by his charms. When these ugly women beam, proudly, when they hold their heads rightly high, the flush of victory coloring their cheeks only brings the extent of their impoverished appearance into sharper relief. It is a terrible shame.

There is, then, something unknowable exchanged between such men and women, an intimate communion. There is something they see in each other, know in each other, that few others can see. When their bodies meet in darkened bedrooms, hip bone to hip bone, muscles of thigh threading together, lips and teeth to neck, as they taste each other's breath, they know, truly, where beauty is found.

The bewilderment of those who encounter handsome men who love ugly women is borne of an uncontrollable jealousy, an intolerance, a certain hostility because said communion is a sacrament for which they have not been ordained by divine grace.

It is a terrible shame, indeed, to be confronted by the sacrilege of handsome men with their perfect faces and perfect bodies draped in perfect clothes standing easily, affectionately, proudly, next to less physically fortunate lovers who cannot hide their inability to count beauty among their graces. Δ



# CATSFUL

BY JOHN GOSSLEE

silk sheer  
paws

a cup full  
of birds

goose feather  
walls

lick and cough  
fur

# SKIN

BY JOHN GOSSLEE

a bird huddles  
with a crocodile

gold-hay  
over dirt

day lilies  
in a prison window

a jacket  
over a shirt

# IN SERVICE—BOXING DAY 2010

BY DAVID APPLEBAUM

Some occult school of Hamlet  
howls for a storm  
too numinous for ghosts

as it gnashes reality  
down to the bones

some discourse hurtles  
around unseen axes  
between the far antipodes

Yes I would say one  
long breath creates  
vowels whose vent  
drowns all in God

that secret force  
binds then to revel  
undoing light-struck

# BY VIRTUE OF DEFT

BY DAVID APPLEBAUM

The private parch  
mid-way in waves  
mulled from the skein

there hoar white  
foxes dance cornfields  
mitered and tasseled

while on one horizon  
gathers the horde  
to ruin day-crops

windward across the pit  
a dull cowled voice

some maniacal urge  
lapses into rescue  
the word bespoke





# GRAY AREA

BY R.A. ALLEN

The room was on him like shrink wrap, its stucco walls fighting him for every breath. It had been this way for weeks.

There was nothing on TV but static, so he poured a tot of vodka into his juice and shuffled out into the burning Arizona morning.

He set his cocktail on top of the air-conditioner, which was protruding from the outside wall, and sat down in the patio chair next to the unit, still feeling tired. Above him, the awning of a tile roof provided a strip of shade ending inches shy of his slippers. His drink was lukewarm and he thought about walking down to the breezeway to see if they had fixed the ice machine. The air-conditioner droned against the heat in laborious rise-and-fall cycles, like an army of cicadas.

Here at the Saguaro Motor Courts (Kitchenettes, Air Cooled) the view from his easy chair consisted of a one-block, sun-baked stretch of road that had once been part of Route 60. As a rule, automobile and pedestrian traffic on the street was light, but that morning, there was none at all.

Looking left, he could see the corrugated metal wall of a vacant warehouse. Looking right, claiming the northern end of the block, there was a power substation, its monolithic transformers guarded by a chain link fence. A single, emaciated palm tree stood in the median in front of the warehouse. A cat slept under its meager shadow.

This view represented a long fall in a short time: from a secure middle-class retirement in a Sun City condo community to this scorpion-infested eyesore in South-Central Phoenix. The fall was precipitated by converging personal disasters: both of their 401Ks had bellied-up, and then there was her terminal pancreatic cancer. Coupled with his own deteriorating health, their savings were all but consumed.

It was very quiet and the air was tawny with pollen and dust. Where were the cars? Was today Sunday? Was the street closed off for repairs? He could not spot any barricades.

He rested the back of his head against the wall.

Perhaps he dozed.

\*\*\*

Time passed, and he awoke. Certainly it was past noon. The air conditioner—phased-off or frozen-up—was quiet. The cat still lay curled at the base of the palm. He looked for changes in the positions of shadows—of

the palm tree, of light poles—anything that might indicate the passage of time, but the sun above was an umber ball, weak in the dust-laden sky. Maybe the cat was dead?—roadkill from last night.

He made to shout at the cat, to get its attention, to make it lift its head at least, but he hadn't spoken for three days and his throat was clogged with phlegm.

He scanned the street for signs of life. It would have been refreshing to see someone peddling drugs on the corner, or to have one of the area's transients wander by with a shopping cart, or even see a bird in the sky. He waited. Nothing moved and the world remained as soundless as thought itself.

What was he to make of all of this...inertia? Had the area, or even the entire city, undergone some kind of evacuation?

Or did this stagnant panorama signal an aberration? A stroke? The symptoms, which he'd memorized from a pamphlet in a doctor's office—headache, numbness, vision problems, rampant confusion—were missing.

Or maybe it was a self-induced trance? Could he be suffering from a self-induced trance? A hallucination? Maybe (and the idea struck him as fittingly droll) he was dying of boredom.

He thought more about dying, and what if he was already dead? Already in the afterlife? Rather, an early stage of it—call it a pre-afterlife—a final image frozen in his visual cortex while the electricity in his brain petered out?

He took another drink. World's demise? Endgame mind tricks? Last call in the house of his days?

He would wait for the answer. It wasn't as if he didn't have the time. Δ

# SPIDERBLUE VACATION

BY RANCE DENTON

Mosey picked up a bass. Came from a poor family of drinkers, enjoyed the heart-throb of the strings. Yax played guitar like a goddamn maniac, but only knew two-and-a-half backwards chords, and dyslexia meant she'd never be a surgeon, or that's what Dad said while he smoked and fucked. Gibbons, his throat-notes were a golden ticket and he had a crazy eye—looked like glass that never stopped crying—because out of the womb he and his Mum both screamed for the brown stuff, and I'm a rocket man, burning up my—hit it early, started in small clubs with small beers and small rocks, rock n' roll the way G.G. and Iggy wanted it done, but Yax said not like those Sex Pistols faggots, corporate cock-tools, even though Mosey secretly thought Sid was the best thing since sliced—Gibbons, hey, you feel like getting famous, because you just gotta take your protein pills and put your helmet on. Bugger off—next gig, bare tits in the audience; sign this contract, mates, but Gibbons didn't give a shit and Yax thought it was posh and Mosey, Mosey just needed boatloads of cash for boatloads of beer, so anarchy in the UK, whatever you need; manager with a head that's been in the powder since '74 and whose veins got more expensive tastes than ours. Pass me that bottle of white lightning, because he's burning up his fuse out here alone; a bus, sure, most wonky one you can find, a shower and a bath and a fucking mini-bar, too, just as long as it's got tires. Gibbons woke up one day white-puking, Tower of Babel, Jesus died for somebody's sins—arena, I've only been here, Mosey said, for football. It's smoky in here, just broke a string, crowd's a wild pulse, a raving lunatic, throbbing in my in my in my—spit it out, Yax, Yax, you're growing centipedes and there's a wild village in your soul, and his dick's as big as a fifty-gallon drum, but whatever, whatever; why remember fuck-all when you're worth just as—don't say that; and oh, endorsements and—somebody's sins, but not mine, you need a mirror, Gibbons, see what you look like 'cause your nostrils are a black hole and Mosey's insides are a hot, twisting reflection of everything—Yax, your cooter and that toilet look like a goddamn crime-scene, because periods don't have heads; we could have gotten smarter, known better, you wanna blow, because Mosey doesn't play bass anymore and what's a fucking guitar, and Gibbons ain't been around in weeks; fantastic bus, but they say you're not holding up your end of the—yeah, the singer's the only one with maggots on the brain, dig him up, maybe we'll give it a shot, play to a hundred-thousand; we didn't write any of that shit, didn't have time, and dyslexia, you know,

let's pick Mosey up from the dry-house and put a bottle in 'em; one big happy family but I forgot the spikes, you git, I learned to dance with a hand in my pants, just need new vocals, new shouts, new screams, and we're all screaming. Flash-in-the-pan, quick ups and quick downs; we gotta trash that ride, baby, too expensive, sucks up gas, crash at my flat or yours, either one as long as you've got the brown stuff, so we can lean back, Mosey and Yax and what-was-his-name-Gibbons, and like a leper messiah relive relive relive just to hope we can learn how to fucking breathe next time, because the ones who're still alive are old and shitting on themselves, if we could'a only slowed down, we'd be heroes. Maybe we'd claw our way out of this mess, play bass with skinned fingers and use our fingernails as guitar-picks, never had a drummer—who needs a drummer when you've got no heart—but we've got a basement still, and a bag, mate, so what are your names, hey, I knew some blokes with those names, Mosey, Yax, and Gibbons, yeah, thought maybe we'd give it another try, because no matter how many goddamn times we live you only die— Δ

# A FIELD GUIDE TO YOUR SAINTS

BY ANNAH BROWNING

You will recognize this one  
 by the blue. He is turning  
 a lamb's head around and around.  
 Saying, *See here? See here?*

\*\*\*

Another runs his hands repeatedly  
 through water. He is trying  
 to get it clean. He wants to get it in  
 through his skin. A doe  
 doesn't know much about this.  
 She might come and lick it  
 all off him. Harmless.

\*\*\*

This one is rolling his skin  
 into strips, leaving it  
 for the bees. *Honey, my honey,*  
 he says. They cloud  
 over his hand instead.  
 They get so heavy.  
 They make him stop.

# PRODIGAL

BY ANNAH BROWNING

I cross my arms above  
my chest. I will not

be blessed, I will not have bread.  
I go into the corridor

at nightfall, I whisper birds?  
birds? It's all playful

now. A ghost called Remains  
to Be Seen is sitting down,

head of the stairs. Once, I knew  
her, her mouth's petal,

portal sound. She doesn't look.  
Outside in the garden

there's a waste. Rose bramble  
piled high. In the rain

no one is burning. In the rain

nobody can see us.

## DAYBOOK

BY ANNAH BROWNING

Some days have more  
friends than other

days have friends. Some times  
fill my cup up

with their little minutes. Hours  
I tack in a frame, leave

on the wall. When I come back  
in, they're gone, not even

a glimpse, not even a pie rotting  
on the windowsill, filled

with fingers or claws, some bird-  
animal looking

for its daily rest. Daily. That word  
I would like to bring

into my hammock and keep;  
it is something I would

hold up to the level of my eyes  
and say, hand at the level

of your eyes, hand at the level  
of your eyes, this is how

we cheat the garroters, this is how  
only we can win.



# MARCHA

BY D.E. STEWARD

Andrianople red

Tantric sexuality

Matsya, mamsa, madya, mudra, maithuna

Subjective realities

Apartheid days, sinister but exhilarating days

Anger, resignation

Unrelenting hate

Israel's sophisticated founding fathers did not anticipate the consequences of the inherent geographical impasse

*Blut und Boden* more telling than great events and transoceanic distances, the verification of self on ancestral soil, relief from evasions and guilt and perplexing conditions of survival long pent-up

She has no grandchildren, and with alcoholism, anorexia, sloth, divorce, and nearly complete insolvency, none of her four kids help her in her near-indigent financial ruin

Although all live near her in California she is remarkably alone

Her insolvency was a repetition on a descending scale, daughters busily and handily recapitulating their mothers' lives

All in the peculiar California way of fleeing the past while ignorant of its implications

Dideon's *Where I Was From* and then some

For counter-intelligence decades ago, you reported to Brooks Brothers at 666 Fifth, gave them your name  
And were fitted for two heavy suits (charcoal or brown) and one summer suit (each tailored with a slot pocket for your issue snub-nosed .38), a pair

of black wingtips, leather belt, five white shirts, five pairs of long socks, three ties (paisley, your choice), a trench coat, a fedora

Barneget Light and Cape May, March 15th and 16th after a stiff winter

Red-throated loon, horned grebe, mute swan, snow goose, Canada goose, American black duck, gadwall, mallard, northern shoveler, white-winged scoter, black scoter, long-tailed duck, harlequin duck, common eider

Ruddy turnstone, sanderling, purple sandpiper, semipalmated sandpiper, bufflehead, common merganser, American coot, herring gull, greater black-backed gull, laughing gull, and the expected passerines and raptors

Goya, also called oriental red, orient red or red current

A subject of conversation between Emperor Motecuhzoma and Hernán Cortés in the early stages of the Mexican conquest was an alliance of Spanish weapons and leadership with Aztec manpower with the goal of conquering China

July 11, 1995, the Bosnian Serbs rolled into Srebrenica to murder Bosnians en masse when the Dutch UN troops there did nothing to stop them, the worst day of all in that war

Incident analyses: The Conquest of Mexico, Srebrenica, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Nanjing, Sharpeville, the Lindbergh Kidnap, the *Pueblo* Incident, 9/11, Bush II's reelection, etc.

Soul lethal black matter

Red

Deep, unalterable red

Xu Bing's Square Word Calligraphy from 1994 allows English text rendered so that it appears to be written in Chinese characters

A like inversion of calligraphy into majestic nonsense as in his grand *Book from the Sky*

All written, scroll after scroll, folio after folio, with absolutely synthetic

characters, confounding anyone literate in Chinese

Gibberish, tricky and vastly intelligent gibberish

Something like Edouard Vuillard's obsessive awareness of the ultimacy of the act of looking and its recording

In every detail of every painting and pastel in his astonishing catalog of at least 3,000 works

His marvelous detailing of the Third Republic metropole

The web of family, the inventory of civility and convention

France and China, China and France

One of Xu Bing's performance pieces, 1994 in Beijing, was two Large White hogs copulating, one's rump painted with Chinese characters, the other's with English

Large Whites distinguished by their picturesque bearing, erect ears, slightly dished faces, white color, pink skins, and long deep sides, and as their name suggests, typically they are very large

Beijing Black is breed found throughout China. Black but occasionally with white markings, Beijing Blacks originated in China from crossing Berkshires and Large Whites with local breeds like Dingxian, Shenxian and Zhouxian

Large Whites look a lot like Chester Whites, a common American breed that originated two centuries ago in Pennsylvania, Chester County

The dramatic arcs and dives of Caspian terns feeding off Higgs Beach in Key West at dawn

Their hurried earnestness

They fly to fish, fish to fly

Against a sky as indomitable and transparent as deep antique lacquer on Chinese red Δ



# GAMES WITH THE POET

BY BENJAMIN GOLUBOFF

The poet and I are in Amsterdam. This is because in my case the divorce is over and by a calculus too weird to go into I've got a little money for once. In his case it's because he just does things like this: jets about, plays Master of Revels, breathes deep and blows long. His money never tires. Just the thing for you, he says, after your long unpleasantness. A little international hoo-ha. Come with us.

So we're walking in Oud Zuid, two dislocated academics. There's reefer in the air and gusts of Indonesian cooking. Sinister parks where you picture the backpacker kids having it off in the underbrush. And women. Women for days. They glide by on bikes. They carry loaves of bread and bundles of flowers. It's *shikse* heaven.

The poet sees me looking. What do you imagine, he wants to know. I mean aside from the pneumatic part. Where do you imagine you'll get when you've gotten over? What does your desire imagine? And it turns out I know what to say. I tell him I imagine her place. We're in her place and outside are the night and the street. And there is the knowledge that if you were out in that night and street we would be invisible to you inside. This I tell him is a way of imagining getting close to a woman, living inside her style, being in the way of her way.

We're so different, he tells me. Mine is nothing like that. A tram stops up ahead of where we're walking. Girls in leather and denim get off. And there's a weird touch of home here. The kids in the park have Wilco turned up loud: "Theologians." Tell me yours I start to ask, but he's already making headway.

You're talking domesticity, householding. Talking isn't it cozy. I'm talking about desire as an elemental property. The force that through the green fuse drives the flower, yes? The wind, if you will, beneath our wings. What happens when you get all the way to the bottom of desire when desire is understood as an elemental condition? The squares would say you land at the still point of the turning world, but I think it's more like you come to a point of extinction. The candle snuffed out. With desire, man, if you're really doing it right, you come to a place of nonbeing.

The last light is on the canal. Paddling around a moldering houseboat is this weird-ass kabuki-looking grebe. I later learn it's the Great Crested Grebe. The women recede for a moment. Fuck nonbeing, I tell the poet.

Back at the hotel bar the poet's wife has been reading some Hip Hop glossy and scoping the internationals. She's drawn up tomorrow's itinerary and is ready to entertain discussion.

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The poet is over at my place with some of the younger turks: junior guys from the U., some impresario-type the poet knows from his demi-mondaine period. He'd told me all about the guy: 'twas at Aleppo once and so forth. Couple others too. The poet has showed up with a trunk full of cocktail stuff and there's this elaborate buck and wing about who can make the girliest drink. The impresario achieves something mauve. The poet's ornithologist buddy gets lost in making a tableau of swords and cherries, wedges and moons of citrus.

Shuck follows jive. Sign follows countersign. It's a good little party. The poet offers games: some invented for the evening, some have been in his pack for years.

*Hag or Crone?*  
*Grade Your Chops*  
*Greeter for a Day*  
*Solecism of the Week*

Well into the rites I leave the room to take a phone call. It's from another story and somehow the poet knows this. Which one was that, he wants to know when I come back. Which of your old homeboys? Was it the one who's packing heat, the one you call The Gun-Totin' Small Businessman? He's got little names for them all, the poet tells the turks. *Noms de conte, roman a clef* shit, see. Was it The Depressed Lawyer, The Gay Rabbi, The Son of the Failed Aristocracy?

It was The Gay Rabbi calling about The Depressed Lawyer, I tell him. We're worried about him. The poet lifts a skewered maraschino from the ornithologist's tableau and asks me what I call him, him the poet, when I'm speaking to the homeboys. Nominations come from his Amen corner: Ten-Ride, T-Bone, Rowboat. It looks like we're going to get away from this, but the poet brings us back. No really, what do you call me? Rest assured baby, I tell him, I always just call you the poet when I am speaking to the laity. And what about these guys, he asks, your retainers and droogs? Do they have names in the story cycle?

This is gallantry from him. They're the poet's droogs, not mine. But the flourish distracts me and I don't see my error before it's too late. The droogs call for their names and I am powerless to edit. The poet's laughing because he's seen it coming. The one I call Media Boy: for a second his mask cracks when he hears his name.

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The poet likes to tell the story of how he insulted Julia Kristeva in a Paris bookstore once. Let's haul ass out of here, he tells me he said, it's starting to smell like the seventies. Guy doesn't care a fig about Kristeva in real time. The thing with him is always to be on the other side of the barricades. Counterorthodox. If the cognoscenti got behind Abbott, the poet would put his fist in the air for Costello.

He called me one afternoon to say he was in Dixon, Illinois, at the Reagan birthplace, and that he had just pissed in Reagan's sink. Some convoluted riff about how his old lady decoyed the tour guide with questions about the Screen Actors Guild while he slipped upstairs and under the velvet rope. Invented? For real? Since then he's always telling me how we got to make a urinary tour of the upper midwest. We go to Appleton, see, for McCarthy's grave, then dogleg up to Ripon to let fly on the birthplace of the Republican party. All we got to do, man, is drink lots of coffee.

We're driving out of some hotel's garage: me, the poet, and the poet's wife. It's Christmastime, right, and across from the booth are these reindeer strung with lights. Festive, you understand. While the poet's wife pays the guy, the poet slips out of shotgun and props one reindeer up on the butt of the next one. Merry Christmas: the reindeer are boning.

\*\*\*

Upscale dining this time. Over his *medallions de veaux* the poet's running down some other guy. I get a lot of this from him: trash-talking the great and near-great, slamming the quick and the dead. Tonight it's about a friend: guy over in Religion. The poet gets particular buzz from talking smack about people I like. The game is to watch me squirm. So the guy's a fraud, a New Age carnie and snake-oil vendor, a fakir faker. And so on and so on and scooby dooby dooby.

The thing of it is, though, the poet's an atheist: dedicated unbeliever. He is forever telling me about it. The spirit doth but mean the breath, yes? Telling me about old Nobodaddy making his list and checking it twice. Trotting out Edward Abbey's inversion of Occam's Razor. Invert this, I offer, but on he goes.

So this thing about my friend from Religion is a turn, I see, and presents an opening. Why does this ride up your ass if you don't believe in anything? You say my man's not licensed to practice, that he's selling a dumbed-down divinity to the American Stupid. What does that matter if

there's nobody home—capital N, capital H?

There is a moment of hesitation in which I imagine deep calling unto deep beneath the poet's porkpie hat. Then he dodges: I speak of this purely as a matter of form, of form and the logic of consistency within a form. Check this out. In the traditions for which your man speaks there is a zone of interference between the sign and the referent. A big taboo DMZ where language fails when it would speak the Ultimate. You know this stuff, man: the Covering Cherub, the Cloud of Unknowing, the Tao is Silent, yes? For your people I suppose it is the Tetragrammaton.

I say my people thank him and he doffs the porkpie like it was Captain Blood's pirate lid. Then he rolls out the rest of his thing. What your man does is act like that zone of interference isn't there. Acts like language can have its way with the big Unspeakable. And that's bad fucking form, man. That's wearing stripes with plaids. That's kissing with gum in your mouth. It's an insult to the traditions and it's an insult to language.

I tell him about an old teacher of mine, the guy who did me Keats's odes. How this guy used to say that even after the big Romantic consummations—Already with thee!—somebody still had to get up the next morning and make breakfast. Cloud of Unknowing or not, I tell the poet, someone's got to get up the next morning and write the syllabus. Somebody's got to teach the kids.

I'm still hoping to turn his flank here, so I ask the poet why the Tao-is-Silent argument doesn't apply just as well in our own corner of Shipping and Receiving. I tell him Split the Lark and You'll Find the Music. I remind him how We Murder to Dissect. I invoke the dipshit kid who shows up every semester to say professor doctor you take all the life out of the poem when you take it apart that way. Aren't we doing the same kind of bad form every time we leave our nasty tracks all over somebody's thing?

This is an ambush and at first it seems like he doesn't see it. Nope, nope. Couldn't be more fucking wrong, he opines. Category error, dude. You are comparing great things to small. You are comparing the Palace of Art to the Ground of Being. All that shit in the Palace of Art: Gaudier-Brzesca, the Lake Isle of Innisfree, Iggy Fucking Pop. (Here the poet moves his hands as though fondling the outline of some delectable sphere.) All that shit belongs to us. We have title. It is our bitch. We may leave tracks upon it if we will. But the other thing we're talking about, the thing we decline to name, man: we belong to it. That's why your guy's so full of shit when he makes himself its mouthpiece.

Here it looks like the pincers are going to close. And they do sort of.



But baby, I tell him, what we decline to name is what you're always telling me you don't believe in. What you're always giving me shit for believing. Which argument do you want to win today? You can't have both. I move you concede the easier one and admit that my man's OK, that he's just another poor forked creature trying to make out here in the groves of etcetera.

He manages an elegant retreat now. "I'm a Cherry Ghost," he tells me. Then he calls for the check. Reversal, allusion, and coda: extra points in our game. Δ

# DEVOLUTION

BY JONATHAN GREENHAUSE

Although I look human,  
I'm actually a mountain gorilla trapped in a one-bedroom apartment.

I've got a job with good benefits,  
    & my diet of leaves  
has been replaced by milkshakes & french-fries  
    & by hamburgers  
manufactured from a thousand separate cows.

My wife doesn't know where I came from,  
    so she laughs sweetly  
when hearing my voice from the shower,  
    not recognizing  
the howls stuck inside my censored throat,

& one day, I'll reunite with my abandoned brethren  
    somewhere  
in the *Virunga* mountain range of the Congo,  
    only to discover  
it's been turned into a Chuck E. Cheese's.

# FIDO & THE WAR IN IRAQ

FROM SEBASTIAN'S RELATIVITY BY JONATHAN GREENHAUSE

Sebastian places Fido, his industrial-plastic life-size German Shepherd,  
     by the window facing the street,  
 while in the apartment directly across from them,  
 there's a life-size reproduction of a Siamese-cat,  
     & they both stare at each other,  
 as if in some other-worldly metaphysical duel.

Fido doesn't eat at all,  
 but he's got dog-food waiting for him in a metal bowl by the kitchen sink,  
     Sebastian imagining  
 how something magical could happen,  
 how Fido could be converted into flesh & blood,  
 but then the cat across the street would be staring at nothing,  
     all good things  
 capable of bringing about dire consequences.

Sebastian's been thinking about Iraq a lot recently.  
     He normally doesn't delve into politics,  
 but he feels it's too important to keep his opinions to himself,  
 & so he's written one of his 3-word poems to express his anguish  
     regarding the recent American occupation:  
 It's entitled "#90", & it reads: *Steel steal still*.  
 He hasn't made up his mind yet about the definitive word order,  
 but he knows he'll read it at the cash register of his local pet/liquor store.

Sebastian keeps Fido on a leash,  
 fearing how an envious passerby might lure his stationary pet outside,  
     & an orphan stands beneath their window,  
 tossing up stones to scare Fido, but he doesn't move at all,  
 & Sebastian imagines how the cat across the street  
     must be grateful for that.

# AN ENCOUNTER WITH KO UN

FROM *SEBASTIAN'S RELATIVITY* BY JONATHAN GREENHAUSE

Sebastian's walking down Broadway when Ko Un  
 –the famous Korean poet–  
 stops him & asks for his name.  
*Sebastian*, Sebastian says, extending his hand  
 & explaining he's also a poet.

*But I am not a poet*, Ko Un tells him. *I am a butterfly*,  
 & Sebastian stares blankly at him before Ko Un finally adds:  
*Do I look like a butterfly?*

Thinking it a trick question, Sebastian's slow to answer.  
*Not really*, Sebastian replies,  
 & Ko Un smiles & says: *Then I must be a poet after all*,  
 & he takes out his notebook & pens a short poem about Sebastian  
 before continuing down Broadway.

As Sebastian watches him,  
 huge wings unfurl from Ko Un's back  
 & he soars into the air  
 until the small speck of him vanishes into the blue sky.

*Well*, Sebastian says, *I guess I was wrong*.

*[For more about Jonathan Greenhouse and Sebastian's Relativity, see ad on page 89]*

C U R A T

O R I A L

# KINSHIP IN HELL

A BLASTER "AL" ACKERMAN PRIMER BY "MARY J. LEVINE"

## Corn & Smoke

by Blaster "Al" Ackerman  
Shattered Wig Press,  
88 pp., \$12

## Blaster: A Blaster Al Ackerman Omnibus

by Blaster "Al" Ackerman  
Feh! Press  
288 pp., OOP

*L'art pour l'art.* Dr. Alio used to say that a silk sash never put arms back on a Thalidomide baby. They let him get away with these sorts of pronouncements even when he intentionally started dropping his S's (see also: *The Alio Guide to Elf Knowledge*).

Art can't be for itself, in other words. It cannot be separated from its source. This is Hermeneutics 101. Museums are monuments built to honor the Myth of Permanence. What can something mean 100 years later? Meaning is a concept with a heartbeat.

Perhaps this is why the reclusive Blaster "Al" Ackerman has avoided (or shunned) categorization; his meaning murmurs. He holds no university outposts. He has no awards to speak of. He doesn't have a website or an e-mail address. In the world of grants and fellowships and festivals and conferences and clubs—the 'writerly' world—he doesn't exist. He's not in the building.

There is a poster wheat-pasted to a lamppost near the dumpsters behind the museum. It tells you to come back at 2 a.m. and listen for a whistle or a hoot.

If you decide to come back, it's Ackerman's tune you'll be hearing. It's a weird Dixie song.

Ackerman has been playing it low since the 1970s, and is still going strong. His primary medium is 'Mail Art,' which is—for better worse—a disappearing art form (*better put it in a museum STAT!*). Mail Art involves the exchange of visual art and writing through postal correspondence. This end result is a multi-faceted, polyphonic range of visual and linguistic contrivance, often irreproducible outside of its respective context.

Like other artistic and non-artistic communities, the world of Mail Art has its innovators and imitators. Ackerman, while not the originator of the medium, has come to be one of its foremost representatives. John Held Jr. conducts an excellent interview with Ackerman, where they discuss Mail Art et al. at length (<http://www.mailartist.com/johnheldjr/AlAckermanInterview.html>).

Much of Ackerman's writing has been shared across this network, and only a fraction of it has been preserved in official publications. I came across Ackerman by accident (or incident) last year when I learned of a Baltimore-based publication called *The Shattered Wig Review*. Dr. Alio sent me a copy of *Issue 28*, in which was published a selection of letters and other fragments sent by Ackerman to Rupert Wondolowski and the good people at Shattered Wig. The letters were psychotic, self-deprecating, erroneous and hilarious. My appetite had been whetted and I needed more.

Forgoing the Dr. Alio rigamarole (*what a fucking nuisance/nuissance*), I ordered a copy of *Corn & Smoke* directly from Shattered Wig Press. It arrived with a handwritten note from Wondolowski himself. I read the book in an hour and spent the rest of that weekend face down on the kitchen floor, *schvitzing* and *kvetching*. The book is packed with lists, poems, bizarro narratives, and curdled yellow prose that burns the wick at both ends. It's a chunk of hail shaped like a shot glass.

In reading *Corn & Smoke*, I noticed one primary attribute that sets Ackerman apart from the myriad of other writers rendered *melanomic* by too much time under the limelight. Ackerman is utterly non-self-important. The jokes he makes at his own expense are rendered delicately and apolitically. He is unencumbered by the will to impress, and for this reason, his writing is both genuine and inimitable. In other words, when compared to the Standard Modern Writer, Ackerman lacks pretense. It's a breath of dive-bar air.

The most substantial Ackerman collection is the exhaustive (and often exhausting) *Blaster: The Blaster Al Ackerman Omnibus*. The *Omnibus* has been out of print since 1994, though a few used copies can still be found here and there. It's 288 pages, though not always clearly organized or notated, contain most of Ackerman's literary output from the '70s and into the early '90s. While some of these stories and letters are more compelling than others, this collection still gives you an adequate sense of what the world would be like if Franz Kafka fell into a vat of cheap beer and basement-synthesized psychotropics.

As Ackerman asks and warns on the backside of *Corn & Smoke*, "Does common sense tell you that persistent flashbacks to an underground ranch where cowboys and clanking robots look to you for guidance and decision-making may not be entirely healthy? You may be having a BREAKDOWN!!" Dr. Alio reads this and nods: art can't be for itself because it's a goddamned *experiment*. There can be no Experiment without Context, and Blaster "Al" Ackerman is his prophet.

*Anobium* is happy to have established our own correspondence with Ackerman. He sent us the following two selections, which we hope will whet *your* appetite for more. You know where to look. Dr. Alio will fax your pre[s]cription. Δ



# HOW MUCH ECSTASY HAVE YOU KNOWN?

BY BLASTER "AL" ACKERMAN

Dear Waverly Flea

I spent most of Friday taking hot showers and weeping.

Saturday no better.

Sunday no better.

Don't worry, I don't intend to burden you with the entire list

Let's just say it extends through most of June and July

There were about 3 days in there when I was able to leave the house

But on all 3 days I broke down before I could reach my car

And that's not all

*I have recent come across what appears to be a developing trend that, if true, is very disturbing as an insidious tool for the purpose of seduction*

*This is just one of several similar trends I've noticed*

*I strongly suggest lonely, vulnerable people of all sexes memorize the following formula:*

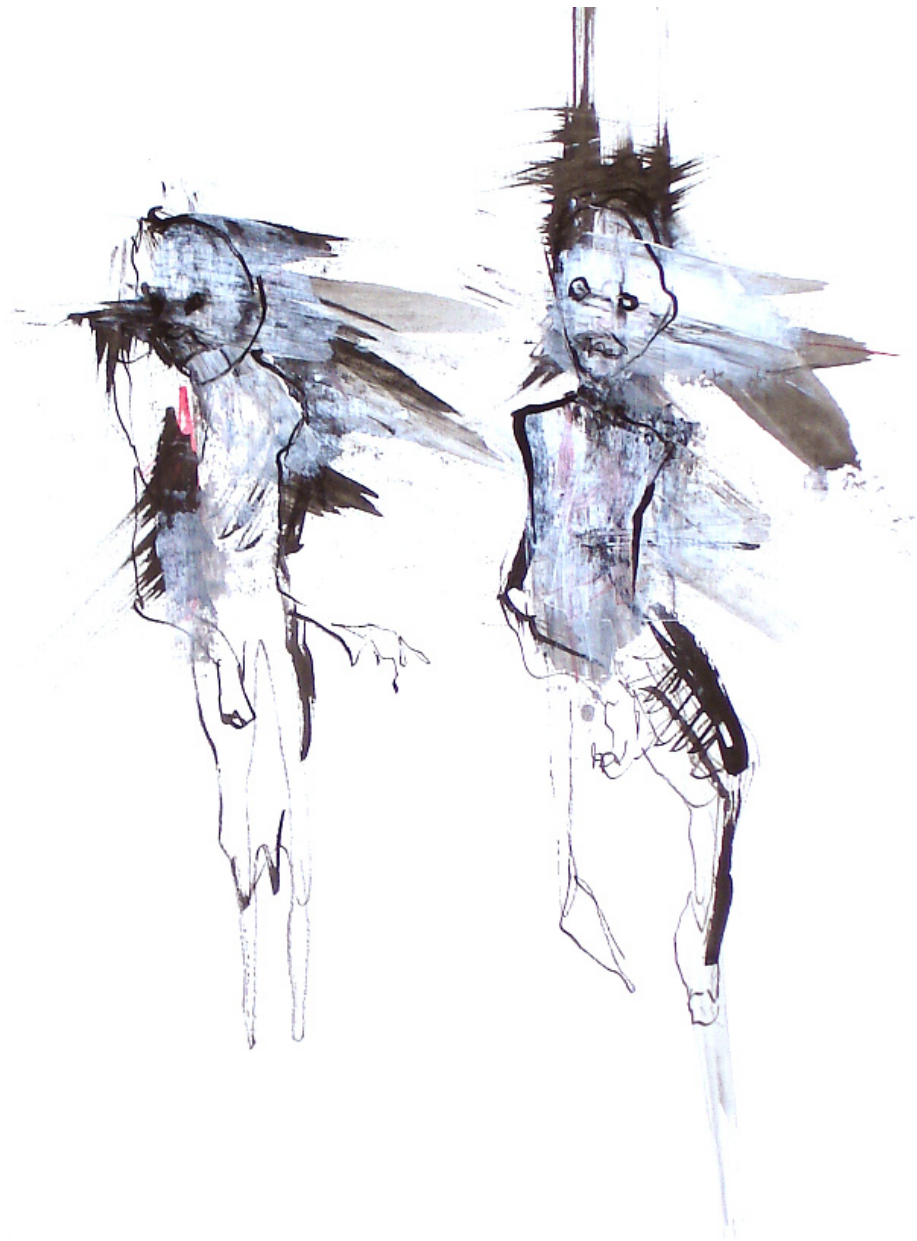
1. first row the fox across
2. and while you're at it
3. better row the sack across too
4. then go back for the elk
5. continue to do this till a hand comes out of the water
6. dressed in the sac
7. the way your glasses are starting to fog up
8. better wrestle with it
9. wrestle with that demon that is within you!

# THE FACIAL SKINNY MYSTERY

BY BLASTER "AL" ACKERMAN

First to see dust of my facial skinny talks a lot  
 Says combination shapeless in the flooded street  
 Believes cheese clouded down the street the way you washed the ham  
 That single pointed french fry thinks a lot about bright red tomb  
 The hole to stuff it up in shoe is drool  
 5 scabs talk it up but they don't stay to count  
 What seems to flutter is my lower back in pain  
 You jump the cash and gristle claw the knife  
 In place of a garden there's a huge moon which serves for its eyes  
 Now whatever direction your shimmery hand sees muc  
 Lather in my mouth's the one asks "Won't you blow me?"  
 Also sees Johnny nod the filth direction is the one  
 My trouser bag creeps along my arm and says it needs to pee again  
 Otherwise suffer nostril to rebate rebellion giggling in the woods  
 These indeed were the real enemies for they no more than tell us about their  
 rent

*THANKS TO JMB OF 9.16 etc.*



# MASS GRAVES & SEAFOOD SECTIONS

AN ESSAY BY DEREK SANCHEZ-HOEKSEMA

My name is Derek Sanchez-Hoeksema, I am 25 years old, and I am a mortician. The tools of my trade are sincerity, empathy, carcinogenic chemicals and glue. My skill set is unique; raising arteries, vacuuming, reconstructing facial features, and the ability to match my shirt and tie.

This is the point where the conversation usually ends.

My profession is a great conversation stopper. No one wants to talk about death and dying. It isn't a fun topic to discuss, especially with a stranger. That's the part no one thinks about. There are simple jokes about my job, like *people are just dying to see me* and *at least no one talks back to me*. Everyone is so focused on the one who passed away, we tend to forget about the family and friends left behind. These are the people I meet with on a daily basis. What can I say to a 17 year-old kid when his dad shot himself moments after sending out a mass text suicide note? What do I say to a dad, who lost his daughter in a freak accident, when he calls me at 3 a.m. wanting to bring her dogs to the funeral home to say goodbye? It's heartbreaking. Death is something that can't be avoided. We can invent new ways to postpone it, new distractions to push it to the back burner, or create new beliefs to romanticize it. The fact is that death is a constant, unchanging mystery. I think that is what makes it so scary. No one person has the answers. It isn't something that can be explained away. Science can quantify heartbeats and respiration rates, but it can't measure the distance between this life and the next. *It's fucking terrifying.*

I meet people on the worst day of their lives, and help them navigate this new 'normal'.

I attended Worsham Mortuary School from 2009-2010. The school is located in Wheeling, IL. The campus itself is sandwiched between an industrial warehouse and the Shri Swaminarayan Temple. And—to be honest—to call it a campus is a delusion; it's a small brick building. It resembles what you might imagine when you think of the outside of a funeral home. Inside consists of 3 classrooms, a lunchroom/Restorative Art lab, a "library" (which has a giant bronze bust of JFK sitting on a bowed bookshelf), a "museum" (which contains old methods of embalming and trade magazines), and a small showroom (which, in the mortuary world, is

usually a casket selection room). It always struck me as odd that Worsham had a showroom, because Worsham is a school and not a funeral home. However, that was the room I ‘identified’ with most; something that looks like it belongs, but really feels out of place.

That’s how I felt during my year at Worsham. The funeral business is a family business. People that just decide to get into it – people like me – tend to not have the best of luck. Most of my classmates came from family funeral homes, or had already been involved in the business prior to attending school. My classmates ranged in age from 18-63, and there were more women than men in my graduating class of 100+ students.

When you enter the school (much like at a funeral home) you don’t use the front door. There is a back door that doubles as a smoker’s ‘lounge.’ Once you enter the building, the smell of clay hits you. At Worsham, you have to reconstruct an entire face as part of your curriculum for Restorative Art. For that we used clay, which has a distinct, earthy smell.

There are three main members of the faculty. The main teacher is Mr. Kowalski, who teaches Embalming, Restorative Art and Funeral Directing. Between classes he spends a lot of time smoking in the ‘lounge,’ and he is very matter-of-fact with his teaching method. “If you don’t know it, you better learn it.” He has a slight tremble in his hands, which make him seem unstable while embalming. He is a legend at Worsham because he has been teaching there as long as anyone can remember.

Mrs. Robinson teaches Microbiology, Anatomy and Chemistry. She has long curly blonde/white hair and wears glasses. She loves Power Point presentations and giving tests, and was always easily upset by the immaturity of a few of my fellow classmates.

Mr. DiCanio teaches Pathology and Funeral Arrangements. He is an old carpetbagger from Chicago. Instead of having their own funeral homes, carpetbaggers are independent professionals who rent out different funeral venues for hosting funerals. Mr. DiCanio is round and tan, and when he talks, he closes his eyes and uses his hands. His phone number is 222-TONY. We sometimes called his number in the middle of his class, and he would always step out into the hallway to take the call.

The key for doing well at Worsham is learning how to regurgitate mass amounts of information. The amount of information I was going to digest, I worried, was going to make it impossible for me to retain anything. Fortunately, the program was set up to help students learn as much as possible in each course.

Once you've taken all of the core curriculum, you then take the state licensing exam. Everything you study at Worsham is to prepare you for this test. As such, Worsham has a rigorous internal testing schedule, which is graded on a 7-point scale, rather than the standard 10 (100-93 is an A, 92-85 is a B, etc.). You need to get at least 75 in all classes to pass. I did well at school, and for the entire year, I was the only one who was never late and always on time.

The first six months of the program involved the core curriculum at Worsham, and the days ran from 8 a.m. to 2:20 p.m., Monday through Thursday. The last six months added in a Practical Embalming lab at the Cook County Morgue (the Medical Examiners Office), which is located in the Medical District on West Harrison in Chicago. I drove to the MEO on Thursdays, and the lab ran from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. I wore scrubs on those days and met the other students in the basement lunchroom for roll call.

We sometimes joked around with the morgue janitor, who would be on lunch when we arrived. Mostly we made jokes about *Die Hard* and working in the Nakatomi Towers and so forth. He wouldn't laugh, but we would – mostly to give ourselves an excuse to be laughing in a morgue. After roll call, we would walk down a dimly-lit hallway, and then ride a service elevator up to the autopsy suites. That's when the morgue smell hit you. People always ask, how can you deal with that? What does it smell like? It smells exactly like the seafood section at the grocery store. I can't eat shrimp the same way anymore.

Outside the suites, we donned our Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): face masks, gloves, gowns, shoe-covers, hair nets. All of the PPE is made for one-time use. The autopsy suite has four stations, each of which has a metal table. On each metal table, there would be an unclaimed body wrapped in blue Visqueen (a type of plastic sheeting). Most of these bodies had already spent months in the morgue coolers, which are utilized to slow decomposition. Despite this, most of the faces became leatherized after sitting for so long. Six students are assigned to each station, and each student has a specific job; four students 'raise' arteries (two femoral, two carotid), one student aspirates the thoracic and abdominal cavity, and other student sets the features (placing eye caps and utilizing muscular sutures to close the mouth). Because most of these bodies were in poor condition—even after our sessions—it was difficult to tell if the corpses were properly embalmed.

Though we were there to learn, we also were doing a service for the

city by taking care of the indigent peoples' remains. Every so often, the city digs a mass grave and uses it to dispose of these anonymous, freshly-embalmed bodies.

While I was in that first year of school, I was also working full time at a commercial insurance call center. It was as monotonous as it sounds, but it paid the bills. I took inbound calls from people who had perhaps slipped and fallen on the floor of an A&P in Newark, and other things like that. It was a simple job; I was good at it. I even met Vanessa (the love of my life) while working at the call center. We bonded over pay-day lunches and watching *Judge Judy* in the break room. Our friendship developed outside of work, and we eventually got engaged. Of course, the call center had a strict "no inter-office marriage" rule, and I knew the call center life wasn't my real passion. As my relationship with Vanessa grew—and as I grew up a little more—I decided it was time to fully dedicate myself to the funeral profession.

Near the end of my year at Worsham I was lucky enough to land an interview at a local funeral home in Wheeling. I was offered an apprentice position there the next day. Vanessa and I picked a date for our wedding that same day. Everything seemed to be falling into place. It was *serendipitous*. After such a grueling year at school and work, I was very proud to see all of my work finally paying off. I just had to commit myself.

For my second and final year of schooling, I worked as an apprentice at the Kolssak Funeral Home in Wheeling. In the state of Illinois, you must serve as an apprentice for a full year after completing Mortuary School in order to become fully licensed. During your apprenticeship, you are required to complete 24 "Case Studies," where in each quarter, you must submit six Embalming Case Studies and six Funeral Directing Case Studies. Each of these consist of a two-page questionnaire. For an embalming case, they want to know what artery and vein you injected and drained from; they want to know the type and amount of fluid used; they also want to know what type of stitch you used. You have to answer questions regarding the condition of each body (autopsied remains, jaundice, edema, mutilation, gangrene, bedsores, etc.). Depending on the condition, you need to alter your approach and type of fluid used. Each case is unique.

For the Funeral Directing Case Studies, the first page was a yes/no questionnaire about the arrangements. *Did you help receive the family? Did you order the casket? The vault? Did you coordinate with the cemetery and the*

*clergy?* All of these things need to be accounted for. On the second page, I had to describe the case in detail; the type of service, the family's needs and wants, the church used, the casket used, and other details. Once all four quarters are completed, you can then apply for your license.

I learned more in my first week at Kolssak than I did in my whole year at Worsham. As with all institutionalized education, Worsham teaches about the ideal situation. The real world is never ideal. You have to be able to improvise. This is what I learned at Kolssak.

Sometimes when I make arrangements with families, they ask my age and why I chose funeral service. It's quite a question. I never think to ask my doctor why he chose to be a doctor, or why my mailman why he chose to be a mailman. I don't have the typical fall-back answer of *it's what my father did, and his father before him*. Death is just another part of life. It's a shitty part, but it has to be dealt with.

For this reason, it's hard to explain why I chose this business. What makes me want to wake up in the middle of the night to meet families at their worst moments, trying to talk them through the process? I've always had a strange relationship with Death. I've never been particularly afraid of it—for myself, at least. Since I was young, I've thought about death and dying; not in a weird *Azrael Abyss* way, but as more of a curious notion.

Even when I was young, I thought about the kind of life death left behind here on this sphere of existence. I never thought much about the afterlife for the deceased. For the dead person, I thought, death must be boring. I always thought about what everyone else was doing after someone died. My thinking was that when I died, I wouldn't be able to play SNES or watch Star Wars (both necessities for me at the time), so perhaps this thinking was partly inspired by jealousy. Of course, as I see it now, life is about *enjoying life* and sharing moments with people you love. And, if you are lucky, you can share in that grand, final moment...

Or so it goes. Δ

*Derek Sanchez-Hoeksema enjoys banana pudding, perusing Target clearance sections, playing the banjo and practicing amateur podiatry.*





# "I'M JUST A WEIRD DUDE."

## A CONVERSATION WITH PATRICK SOMERVILLE

CONDUCTED BY BENJAMIN DAVID VAN LOON

The subject of knowledge will often come up in the Anobium Underground Bunker. When you've got nothing else to do but hawk and ape and drink *TANG*, you find new ways to pass the time.

We ask ourselves, what does it mean to *know* something? Reality is an entity shaped and determined by the relationship between imagination and sense perception. On what authority, then, can we establish a *definitive knowledge* of reality?

Perhaps there is no definitive knowledge of reality. Perhaps the supposition of this definitive knowledge is erroneous, which would irk these white-knuckled masses.

This question keeps Rowsdower up into the late hours, though she is chemically nocturnal. She'll lock herself in the *loo* for night-long stretches, silent as a worm. In the morning, eyes red and mouth dry, we'll see her shuffling off to bed with a weathered, dog-eared, compulsively-underlined copy of Patrick Somerville's *The Universe in Miniature in Miniature*.

The title begs Asimov flashbacks à la *The Fantastic Voyage*, which may perhaps be intentional. *Universe* is Somerville's second short story collection and was released by Chicago's Featherproof Books in 2010. Each story presents a slightly skewed/skewered version of reality, and all of the stories work together to form their own three-dimensional universal synecdoche. In fact, the cover of the book can be converted into a hanging mobile.

We met with Somerville virtually and conducted the following conversation over the course of a few months. He holds an MFA from Cornell University and teaches the MFA program at Northwestern University. Aside from *Universe*, he has published *Trouble* (2006), which is another collection of short stories, and *The Cradle* (2009), a novel which was nominated for the Center for Fiction's First Novel Award. He is a winner of the 2009 21st Century Award and a MacDowell Fellow. His next novel, *This Bright River*, is scheduled to be released by Reagan Arthur Books this summer.

**ANOBIUM: Let's start with the facts. Where were you born and raised, where did you matriculate, and what are you doing now?**

PATRICK SOMERVILLE: I was born and raised in Green Bay, Wisconsin. I went to Madison for college and Cornell for graduate school. I live in Chicago now and I teach at Northwestern and at Warren Wilson. I write, teach, and do a little copywriting now and then.

**Was it teaching that brought you here, or something else? What are some of the challenges you currently face in teaching in Chicago?**

I came here for a girl actually—a girl who is now my wife. As far as teaching goes in Chicago, it's a good place to be. There are many, many schools and many students.

Anyone who's spent time teaching and trying to write at the same time knows that it's hard to squirrel away enough time for one's own work, but it's always doable.

**Have you traveled the world much? Have your experiences 'away from home' lended themselves to the development of your writing?**

My mother is English, and so I grew up traveling back and forth from England and Europe in the summers. Part of my imagination is infatuated with England, both urban and rural, contemporary and historical, and I think that place always lurking at the edge of story possibility for me. In part it's that I've been there so much; in part it's that it's just who I am, in a way, even though it's a little masked by my Wisconsin heritage.

The next novel I'm going to write is going to be set in Sicily; it's about an English and American couple getting married. I went to Sicily and Croatia last summer—both pretty amazing places. But all that said, most of my travel has been limited to Europe. I haven't been to Asia, I've never been to Africa. Not yet, anyway.

**What are your thoughts on Chicago proper? How is it writing here?**

I love Chicago; I love that it's close to where I'm from, and yet fundamentally different, too. In terms of quality of life, and in terms of what's here, I really rank it as one of the greatest cities in the world.

In terms of “How is it writing here?” ... Good, I guess? I’m not sure it’s any different than it would be anywhere else, other than the day-to-day stimuli that get into your head and make it, eventually, into what you’re working on. But part of the reason I like writing, as an art-form, is that it doesn’t matter a whole lot what resources you have at your disposal and it doesn’t matter a whole lot where you are. There’s great freedom to it.

**Is there a mentality or point-of-view characterized by the American Midwest? Is there a POV characterized by Chicago?**

I just don’t know. If there is, I’m not entirely conscious of it. Generally I feel as though people in the Midwest—the rural Midwest, moreso—tend to be (depending on your attitude about the value of communication) either more stoic or more repressed than other groups. And so I think a big theme I find myself encountering and grappling with, often, is whether or not it’s destructive when we fail to connect and fail to articulate what we are to the exterior world. I usually feel as though that’s a big problem, but now and then, I think about the close-lipped model, the silent and unspoken approach to existing, and think: you know, there’s something inherently dignified about that.

**Obviously, you have elements of the strange and surreal in your writing. Is there something about being in Chicago which lends itself to the development of these themes?**

Not that I know of. I’m just a weird dude. One good thing, though, is that Chicago has a very young, very diverse population of literary enthusiasts who are usually open to just about anything. I grew up always thinking that I was by far the strangest person in the room. Being in Chicago at times gives me this wonderful feeling of being part of a large family of wonderful crazies.

**Despite being surrounded by these wonderful crazies, many of them have the critique that what makes literature count as ‘strange’ is that it lacks clarity, realism, or ‘truth.’ What are your thoughts on this?**

I am afraid of people who either a) have trouble with suspending disbelief, conceptually, or b) have trouble suspending disbelief on principle. Both versions of that doubt essentially negate storytelling from the start, and so I find it pretty ridiculous when people start making claims about the de-

gree of real and the degree of true, and how this degree of realism is good, but this degree of realism is useless. To me it's all the same, whether you're reading *Sophie's Choice* or *Nadja*: Pretending something that's not true is true for the sake of finding out what's true.

### **Who are some of your favorite authors? What attracts you to them?**

I'm all over the place with my taste. I tend to like everything, to tell you the truth, which I know is a vanilla answer and makes me sound like a moron, but I very rarely pick up a book and find it so bad that I stop; I think having been a teacher for these last ten years has also made me much more sympathetic to intent, and to reading for the hoped-for goals of authors, not the actual achievements, and so I've just become less and less critical as I've grown as a teacher.

But writers I really like: I like Graham Greene and I like D.H. Lawrence and I like E.M. Forster; I definitely love Hemingway and had my obligatory Hemingway obsession phase in my twenties, but I haven't abandoned him like some people do; some contemporary writers I like are Dan Chaon, Jennifer Egan, Joshua Ferris, E.L. Doctorow, Ann Beattie, Jayne Anne Phillips. Joseph Heller used to be my favorite, but I don't think he is anymore. I've loved Douglas Adams since I was a kid.

### **What are your thoughts when people say 'reading is dead'?**

Of course reading isn't dead, because advertising is still largely predicated on text, and so is the internet, so I don't think it's going anywhere. But reading literature is not so much dead as it's become like listening to jazz music. You can tell someone you like to read and get an eye-roll in response. I wish it wasn't that way, but that's not my attitude about literature. Maybe I'm overstating it.

### **What is it about reading that makes one a better writer?**

Reading makes you a better writer because, well...you're reading. And then you're going and writing. It's like anything, isn't it? You look closely and carefully at what very talented and very skilled people have done, and to get started you mimic them, and eventually, hopefully, something happens while you're doing all that mimicking and cutting and pasting, and

you happen upon something that's yours, even though its parts come from somewhere else.

**Who are some other artists (writers, filmmakers, painters, etc.) you are excited about at the moment?**

PS: I love everything that P.T. Anderson does; that guy is just zeroed in on what I like about storytelling, character, humor. The writer Peter Straub turned me on to the outsider artist Henry Darger, who lived right down the street from my in-laws' house, and I like his work very much now. (Not to mention Peter's.) And as far as music goes, I seem to be stuck in the year 1880. For better or worse.

**Without writing, what would you be?**

Astronaut.

**Do you have a favorite area in Chicago? Landmark?**

Patio Beef on Broadway. It's unattractive as hell but it's a place that makes me very happy.

**Finally, since you work in Evanston - have you ever gotten the 'Box o' Bits' from the Chicken Shack?**

Now I just feel uncool. Δ

# THE SON

BY PATRICK SOMERVILLE

I feel the knife go in and of all the things you'd think it'd make you feel, I feel sadness. Mind just skips the surprise and skips the pain and goes right to knowing that I've come to the end and more than anything, it's too bad to believe, but you believe it, though, because there's the knife sticking in your side. Crazy. I mean of all the things. There's also relief, like at least I'm allowed to stop pretending, not even sure what exactly, but the real feeling is the feeling of sadness. That's all it is.

I'll back up—the situation is strange. All I'm doing is walking down the street. I'm up north near the triangle but I gotta get down to class. Last night was crazy but I made it a thing now to never miss class because something gets crazy. And I've got my hands in my pockets and I'm listening to some pretty backwards Dr. Octagon I got from this old stoner in my building and out of nowhere now on the sidewalk some dude grabs my shoulder from behind and twists me. Here's what Octagon is saying even though he's not up too loud: "Astronauts get played, tough like the ukelele, as I move in rockets, overriding levels, nothing's aware, same data, same system." But since he's not loud I can hear what Colonel Sanders says at the same time (dude who stabs me looks like Colonel Sanders) right before he pushes his big-ass kitchen knife or whatever right into my side, right under my ribs on the left: "I am loving you and I am sending you off, my brother." Which is hilarious, if you think about the dude in charge of Kentucky Fried Chicken calling me his brother, saying he loves me, and killing me. I stare in his eyes. So it goes in and at first it's not too far from what it's like getting a shit, just real focused on one spot and this weird panic coming up from your body saying some shit like, "Not supposed to be going in like that's going in," but as he really pushed and his blades' all the way in there, into my stomach, him kinda hugging me and I don't think anyone on the sidewalk even knows what's happening, everything pretty much shuts off and that's when I'm sad, like I started. So then time is real off from here forward and I'm living like a month every time he pulls out and sticks it back in. I think then people start to notice. And it's like another year later by the time I'm on the ground.

My mother. That's who he's really killing. I saw her at my sister's funeral and that was some shit so strange, speaking of strange, it wasn't even sad anymore. I read this book that had Irish women swooning when they found out their dudes had been killed in battle or whatever but I thought that shit was just made up for the story, to be honest. But there's some-

thing in women—maybe not just women, okay—but you push a person far enough and give them something that’s so sad they gather up this power they have and they blow up, they just blow up. They blow up. It’s a big blow up of a person.

My mother didn’t just throw herself down on my sister’s coffin at that place. No. She started shrieking in this way I’d just never heard. I saw this word, this Lord of the Flies word: ululations. That’s what I thought when I heard the sound of my mother screaming at my sister’s bod, when I saw her leaning over, grabbing at her, knocking over flowers and the portrait, just straight-up out of her mind. Ululation. We got animals inside of us, man. We’ve got all this power.

And so there I am, standing there in my suit, watching my mom do this. It scares me and I can’t even move, I can’t do nothing. But all the old folks, it was like they weren’t even surprised. Not even the old folks, actually - just everyone who wasn’t a kid, maybe. But all these people there, it was like it was normal to see someone turn into this screaming beast, and a couple of the old-timers just kind of went up and held her there while she was screaming. They held her up. She didn’t fight them, really, but still, she kept struggling, because she was fighting something, it just wasn’t there in front of us.

So this is when I realize what I’m seeing.

What I’m seeing is my mother actually making one more last try to change the world.

Put it like this: right then at the moment, while she’s ululating, my mother on some level believes, believes completely, that she’s gonna say, Ah hell not loud enough, to time, and what’s happened, and not just that, but that shit’s gonna work. It’s really gonna work. Not even like a story about how the metaphor of it worked. I mean, it’s gonna work work, and Nicole’s gonna rise up from that coffin, and she’s gonna be alive again. If my mother screams loud enough—so she’s thinking—and strange enough—if she empties herself—enough—she’s gonna change what has happened.

Does it work?

It doesn’t work.

But for a second, it seems like it might

\*\*\*

Back to this. So then I’m at the hospital and I’ve got no idea what I’m doing and still all it really is is sad. I don’t know. I’m lying there and I’ve



got no shirt, someone cut it off. Some doctor's leaning down towards me, talking to me. All I think is: Who was that dude? Colonel Sanders? What did he say? No idea. Why? No idea. Fuck if I want to die, man—I want to live—but still it's like my mind, it knows, even though I don't want to admit it.

I'm doing my wailing as well, even though I'm only half-here for it. Funny to find yourself screaming because it makes you think that all along, you're not the one who's been in control of anything, that being alive is someone else is running you and you're just hooked up to a bunch of dummy instruments like a fake steering wheel.

But either way, I'm doing my ululating.

Time's slow. I've got time to say all my goodbyes. Who knows how it comes out. Here I am dying. You're watching it. I do have time to say all my goodbyes, in my way. I mean the right people are here. But you're right here, so I'll say them to you. Δ



# "I LIKE COLD PLACES."

## A CONVERSATION WITH JESSE BALL

CONDUCTED BY BENJAMIN DAVID VAN LOON

In our interview with Joe Meno from *Anobium: Volume 1*, Jesse Ball was one of the names he dropped when suggesting that the Chicago literary output tends to branch away from traditional modes of style and storytelling, instead preferring experimentation, delineation and lucubration (our words).

While many critics and reviewers often make the mistake of allowing the writer to represent some thing—an idea, a movement, a phase, an epoch—it is nonetheless true that Ball stands out from the rest. In this way, he represents nothing other than himself.

A box of his books was sent to us by Dr. Alio, who currently populates an unmapped island in the South Pacific, where he claims to be conducting intensive metaphysical research.

One of the requirements for his 'Dynamic Syllabus' is to read 777 books a year. He claims this number is insignificant, though in the note he included in the Jesse Ball box, he wrote: "*Though I might have suggested otherwise, these selections threw a hand-forged wrench into the heart of my Brain Machine. Please keep these books safe until repairs are complete.*"

Dr. Alio included most of Ball's work in the box: *March Book* (2004), *Vera & Linus* (2006), *Og svo kom nóttin* (2006), *Samedi the Deafness* (2007), *Parables & Lies* (2007), *The Way Through Doors* (2009), *The Curfew* (2011), and *The Village on Horseback* (2011). The books are jammed with poetry, prose and art. We also found an unopened bottle of Adderall in the box. On the cap, with a fine-point permanent marker, Dr. Alio wrote: "*These might help.*"

Ball's writing is obsessive and fine-tuned to the point of mania. He builds hollow bodies out of Time and Space and destroys them with calculated turns-of-phrase and discursive, explosive prose. You can't make movies of this.

Jesse Ball holds an MFA from Columbia University and currently teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He is the winner of the 2008 Plimpton Prize awarded by The Paris Review for his story, *The Early Deaths of Lubeck, Brennan, Harp, and Carr*. His most recent work—*The Curfew*—is a novel currently available from Vintage.

**ANOBIUM: Let's start with the facts. Where were you born and raised, where did you matriculate, and what are you doing now?**

JESSE BALL: Long Island. 1-18. Vassar College. 18-22. Columbia University. 24-25. Now, 33. Difficult to say what I am doing.

**Had you any affiliation with Chicago and SAIC before coming here to teach? What are some of the challenges you currently face teaching at SAIC?**

None. I hadn't been here, short of passing through on planes.

Main challenge is getting people to understand how much they should read if they want to write.

**You've been to Scotland, Iceland, India, France... anywhere else? Do you have a favorite place? Does this multi-national experience lend itself to the development of your writing?**

I liked the south of France a great deal. I suppose everyone does. I like cold places, though. I am visiting San Francisco and it is 63 degrees in July. I love that.

As for influence—I'd say travel reminds one there are always different ways of doing things.

**How does Chicago compare to the rest? What has being in Chicago done for your writing?**

I like Chicago, but it needs a good hill.

I have gotten a great deal of writing done here, but for that, one needs just an empty room, so the city matters little.

**It seems that certain geographies lend themselves to certain 'creative dispositions.' Is there a mentality or point-of-view characterized by the American Midwest? How about Chicago?**

This is probably true in that some people gather to others like them. I tend

to prefer not being around writers. Although some are okay.

The POV of the midwest—that was the question? I am always confused about whether Chicago is in Illinois, is in the Midwest, or whether it hovers above on giant jet engines. Do you know?

**Obviously, you have elements of the strange and surreal in your writing. Is there something about being in Chicago which lends itself to the development of these themes?**

Not particularly. Certainly the world has many more mysterious cities. One thing about Chicago that I like is that when you get beyond the 15% of the city that has been prettied up there is another city. That one is more interesting than say, the place with the misfortune of being represented by a reflective bean.

**Who are some of your favorite authors? I've read that you enjoy Kafka, which is fairly obvious (especially in *The Way Through Doors*). What are some of the others? What attracts you to them?**

Robert Walser. Rilke. Agota Kristof. Conrad. Basho. I like clarity.

**Some people associate 'clarity' with 'reality,' and they disregarding literature that—for all intents and purposes—lacks 'realism.' What are your thoughts on this?**

Well, I can't speak for all strange literature, although that would be a lovely ambassadorship. I can say that it is ridiculous to pretend that fiction should be as much like the consensus world as possible... it is quite artificial, because no one sees or experiences the world in this way. The world is confusing, it is ambiguous. It is projected backwards and forwards in the mind at all times. A sincere attempt to grapple with how we actually experience things—that is the clarity I speak of.

**What is the strangest experience you've had living in Chicago?**

Someone tried to break into my house at about three AM. I am often awake in the night, so I was not asleep for this person's visit.

**Without writing, what would you be?**

I suppose I would have had to evolve some other way of making progress. Maybe I would be a person who only owns a spoon. I've always been fascinated by these people who own one spoon. I have ideas about what my spoon would be like. Probably these are not the ideas of a one-spoon-person.

**Who are some other artists (writers, filmmakers, painters, etc) you are excited about at the moment?**

I am reading a book by Yelena Dembo that I like. It is about a chess opening called the Grunfeld. She seems like a sensible young woman.

**What are your thoughts on why so many people are reticent to read? What is it about reading that makes one a better writer?**

People aren't all used to reading things they love, and they let others choose their books.

Reading doesn't necessarily make you a better writer, but it is a possible route.

**Out of the other 85% of Chicago, do you have a favorite area? Place?**

There is a bridge over some kind of canal down near Chinatown and it is exceptionally wonderful. It is like a clock and an iron mine having three children and two of them going away for good, but one stays put. That's the bridge. He stayed put.

**In chess, where are you the strongest: opening, mid-game, or end-game?**

Oh, I would love to say the endgame. That's for the real masters to say. I play well when I have made a big mistake and I am trying to hold on with all my teeth. Δ

# AMOK BOOK

PARTS 1 - 8 OF A 61-PART NOVELLA BY JESSE BALL

## 1.

One does not feel throughout one's life that one is always the particular age one is. Rather, there are various stations in which one settles one's identity. As that station becomes unfit, or as one becomes unfit for that station, a new station must be reached. I, for instance, believed myself in many ways to be a child up until two or three weeks ago. Now I feel that I have lost something. But what I have lost it not childhood. It is not the freedom of childhood; that, I preserve. No - instead, I have lost the time in which I was free to imagine myself a child. But what of it? I can still wrap a blanket around my shoulders and hide under rocks and bushes. I can still run through the house as fast as I can, run up and down the stairs as fast as I can. Why is it that we all have a tender spot in our hearts for bank robbers? Is it not because banks should be burned, because money itself is a vile creation? The disrespect of property is a religious propensity, and should be regarded as such.

## 2.

### PERHAPS

it is best to think of myself as an animal, as a bird with a coat of feathers, crouched in the space beneath a bush. A place to live, a way to eat; nothing more. My own entertainments I can provide, and too my own teachings.

## 3.

Without knowing, therefore, what I am after, I head once more into the hills. Up a path, up a road, along a wall. I pride myself on the variety of my foolish physical expression. One moment I am sulking, the next capering and taunting storm clouds. I believe that, were it possible, you might one day meet with me and be thus then affrighted by my terrible aspect. That is to say - at this moment, I am a robber set foot in the public sphere. Do you like my pistol? my dagger? Whatever you answer, you must admit, I carry them boldly. Boldly, yes boldly, I go into town any time I please. Not for me to fear the wag of tongues. Oh, sir, do you recognize me from two nights' past when I erupted from the road to steal your carriage? Well, then, a duel. Let us to it. So you see I am not afraid of CIRCUM-

STANCE, and court it with my every gesture. OF COURSE there are those times, those times when tired and empty of myself, I walk past some brightly lit cottage where a supper of some sort is happily being conducted. It's then that the long years of rascally sit heavily on my shoulders. OF COURSE it is of no account, for should I choose, there's many a winsome maid who'd have me in her house and household, setting up and setting up the days and hours. Yes, the peculiar quality of my life is that I allow myself to think that nothing yet has been excluded. Everything is still possible, and in the meantime I take to the hills and prey upon lone carriages and go with my hands gloved in the finest cloth.

## 4.

Why are people so concerned with closets? I, of course, have had many but never put anything into them. I save the closet strategically. Often I refer to the closets in passing, sometimes going so far as to offer their dubious services to the person in question, as I myself can make no use of them. WHY YOU ASK DO YOU NOT use your closets? WHERE DO YOU PUT your things? And the truth is, I delight in seeing my few belongings. I hang them in place of paintings on the all. I lay them out on shelves. My clothing, my writing supplies, my books, my maps, my tools. On what else would my eyes find such satisfaction as upon these gathered items - that which I find most suiting to myself in the world. And you say, put them away sir? Hid them away in a closet? I shall not. I shall never.

## 5.

Of course, one's empty closets are always filling up with children unexpectedly. Of course, that is the price set, the price that must be paid to live the life I do, in the skin of an owl, on the branch of an evening maple.

## 6.

Fortunately for me the nurses were all blind and my nakedness went undetected all through the first and second parts of this complicated Amazonian hospital in the faltering construction of a dream.

## 7.

Without knowing the names of the men who came this way once, gathered up in this same foolishness which I call strength, I rejoice nonetheless in their companionship in their invisible sovereignty - for surely each has



been and is suzerain of some singly portion of this clever map? Today I resolved to count things in days to take the uselessness of the week and the day of the week and their names and make it still more useless by lettering any letters seventeenth Sunday of the year, fifth Tuesday, thirty-second Friday. Yes, yes, you have perhaps received already one of my frantic letters dated thus on the back: wonder if you took heart at this small uselessness. I wonder if you smiled and braved your way through some season of filth and disease using small kindnesses that I bestowed on you as breviaries or crutches, as pigeons to be mocked and chased. Chase and they shall lead you to the cote where I sit with a good warm bottle of spirits and a fist of chocolate. We shall go on sitting in secret and we shall, I promise you, let no one know what of we speak. And how the portioned day advances never by portion. I refuse its fingertips when they come slipping through my pockets and setting my coat upon my shoulders. Merely because another wants me to go out? Is that reason enough? It is clear to me that the greater part of happiness is to be found in spending as much time as possible roused and gone out from the place in which one sleeps. Yet how to do this simple thing? Even now I write "roused and gone out" yet I'm within my chamber - is it unseemly not to take one's own advice? But I do, I do. I am a taker of my own advice such as there has never been in this world, and there are many who think me different because of it. But there are others - and how sweet their faces are, come calling in my recollection - who see my gladness in the midst of my contrary nature and it is my gladness they go greeting. It is my gladness therefore that goes to greet them that goes walking with them, impromptu, incandescent, ensconced like a glittering mote in the eye of a sometimes pharaoh who calls upon cats and only cats to navigate this much folded kingdom of days.

## 8.

Going out now and then with a heavy wig upon his shoulders Marzipan as soon overwhelmed by the trading of insults that any outward endeavor soon become in these forthright, claptrap, and cancerous times. Have I shown you the masks I made for business purposes? A mask for the bakers, a mask for the bank, a mask for gardening, for correspondence. I took here and there like a left in a dry season, framing my replies with all of my heart. If I knew the interlocutor, if I praised the arbiter with a moment's pause in my rambling interrogations, then who can speak slightly of my influence? Some are born in latter times with great capability for grasping certain facts, certain ideas, but not others, and so, when they go

wandering in their father's garden that is the past they receive at the pond's edge, make no case for myself on the long corridors of history. My time was wasted in speaking with frogs in treating with minor devils of time and armature. I who lapped happily at my own edges, gracing the lips of an October machination, was soon party to the dream sendings of just such an incorporeal statesman of the old sort, bearded, you understand, decorated in blood (all duelists of note, retaining nothing if not their word as bond). They sowed amongst themselves no good season giving onto season and now the walls shudder before the might of an evening no parlor or parlor game can dispel. Go out Millicent, to the porch and see what he wants, go at once. Δ

CONCLU

USIONAL

# THE PARTICIPANTS

**R.A. Allen** writes fiction and poetry in Memphis. [<http://bit.ly/rL9845>]

**David Appelbaum** is a hiker and biker of the Shawangunk Mountains; his most recent book, *Jiggerweed*, was published by Finishing Line Press (2011).

**Annah Browning** bears a passing resemblance to a ginger seal pup.

**Rance D. Denton** spends most of his time eating dinosaur bones and drinking crude oil. [[www.rddenton.com](http://www.rddenton.com)]

**Vernon Frazer** is married and he divides his time between YouTube, Scribd.com and Florida Pacific University.

**Roxane Gay** does not like where she lives.

**Benjamin Goluboff** teaches English at Lake Forest College. [[bit.ly/pnJrZB](http://bit.ly/pnJrZB)]

**John Gosslee** likes to take highkey pictures of crickets emerging from cicada shells and is the Editor of *Fjords Review*. [[www.fjordsreview.com](http://www.fjordsreview.com)]

**Jonathan Greenhouse** is a figment of Anobium's imagination & has serious doubts regarding the existence of "Mary J. Levine."

**Jac Jemc** gave up chapstick in two weeks flat. [[jacjemc.wordpress.com](http://jacjemc.wordpress.com)]

**Jeffrey Maclachlan** would like to see MMA training incorporated into the English discipline. [[@jeffmack](https://twitter.com/jeffmack)]

**Kristine Ong Muslim** is the author of *We Bury the Landscape*. [[kristinemuslim.weebly.com](http://kristinemuslim.weebly.com)]

**D. E. Steward** runs a read-everything and write-when-he-gets-time operation that leaves him holed up and happy.

**Graham Tugwell**, dressed as the Parisian barkeep, throws pin in darkness and does not hear great shame. [[www.grahamtugwell.com](http://www.grahamtugwell.com)]



**Ivan de Monbrison** is a French artist born in Paris in 1969.  
He started his carrer in Paris about 12 years ago.

**All images:** ink and acrylic on paper / 12. 5x9. 5 ins. / 2011

# THE FACILITATORS

**“Mary J. Levine”** owns a *zome* in Vermont and experiments with astral projection and identity theft. [<http://www2.warnerbros.com/spacejam/movie/jam.htm>]

**Benjamin David van Loon** is an unlicensed metaphysical cosmonaut and inexperienced HVAC technician. [[www.benvanloon.com](http://www.benvanloon.com)]

**Jon-Erik Means** studies coal geyser runoff in a lab with some garbagemen and their cousins.

**Bethany Minton** lives in the cold heart land where she preserves worms in vodka and shushes the cat.

**Kari Larsen**’s chapbook, *Say you’re a fiction*, is forthcoming from Dancing Girl Press in the summer of 2012. [[cold-rubies.blogspot.com](http://cold-rubies.blogspot.com)]

**Jacob van Loon** is a part-time assistant manager at Due’s in downtown Chicago. [[www.jacobvanloon.com](http://www.jacobvanloon.com)]

**Sarah Docherty** is a pseudo-Schenkerian idea of what it means to breathe.

# THE ORGANIZATION

Kingdom: Animalia  
 Phylum: Arthropoda  
 Class: Insecta  
 Order: Coleoptera  
 Infraorder: Bostrichiformia  
 Superfamily: Bostrichoidea  
 Family: Anobiidae  
 Subfamily: Anobiinae  
 Genus: **Anobium**

(Bookworm)

- *Anobium* is the headbirth of Benjamin van Loon and “Mary J. Levine,” who doesn’t exist. It was conceived in the winter of 2011.
- *Anobium* is a Chicago-based, independent publisher who specializes in the compilation and assemblage of strange, surreal and insectile literature.
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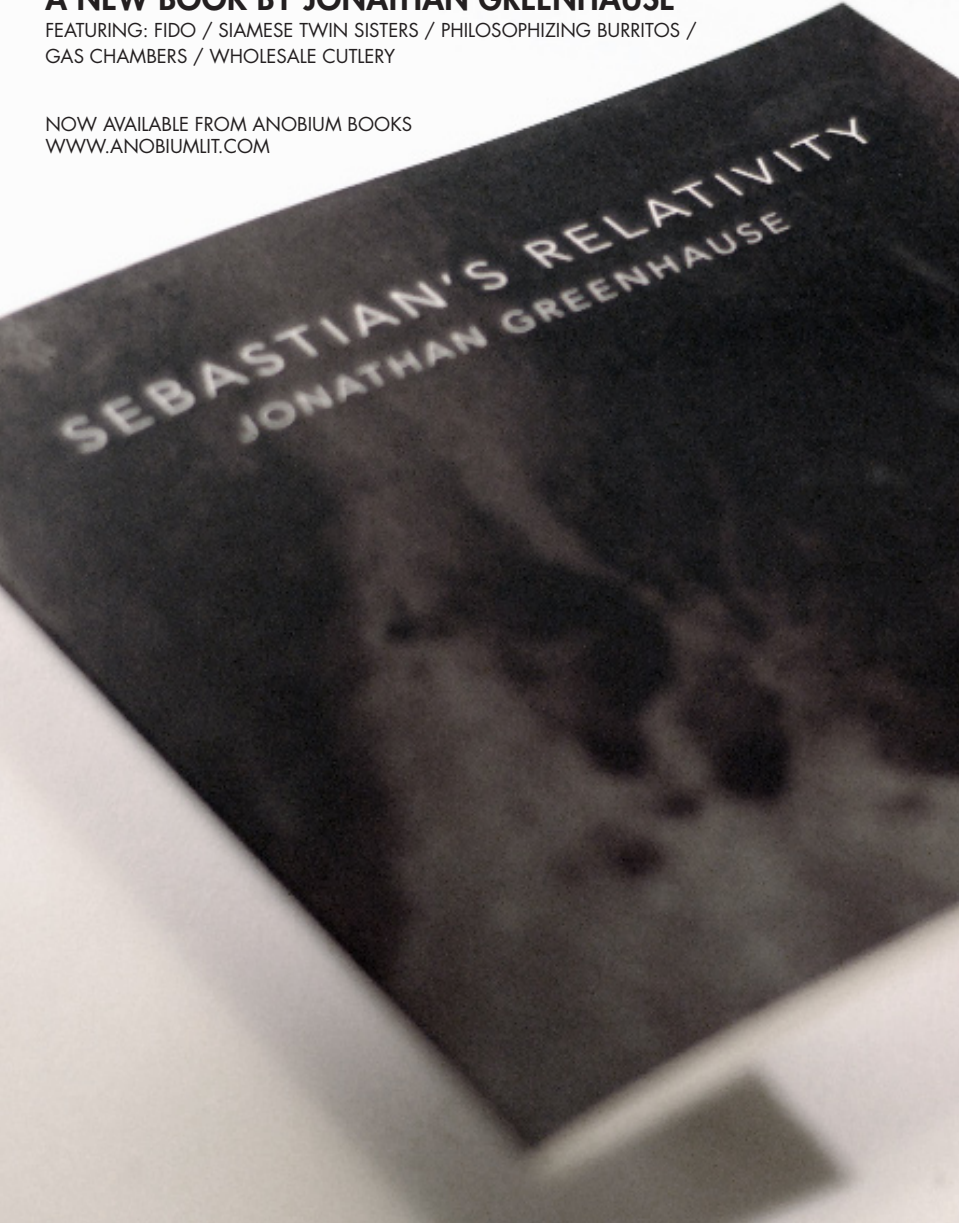
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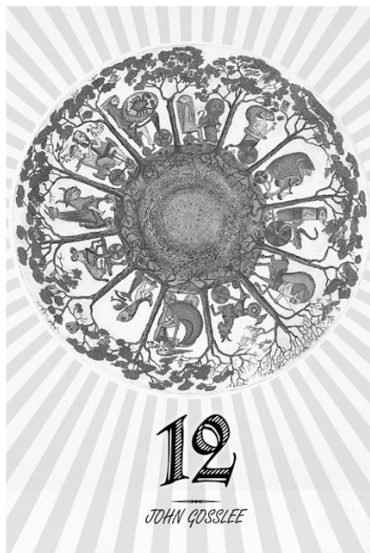
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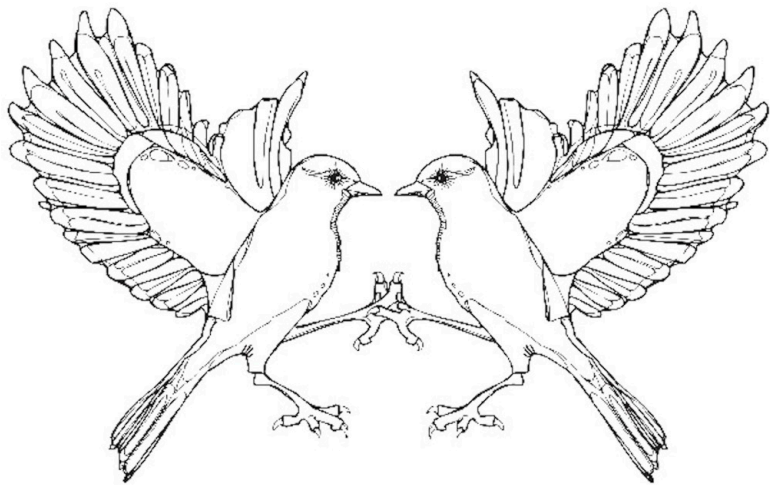
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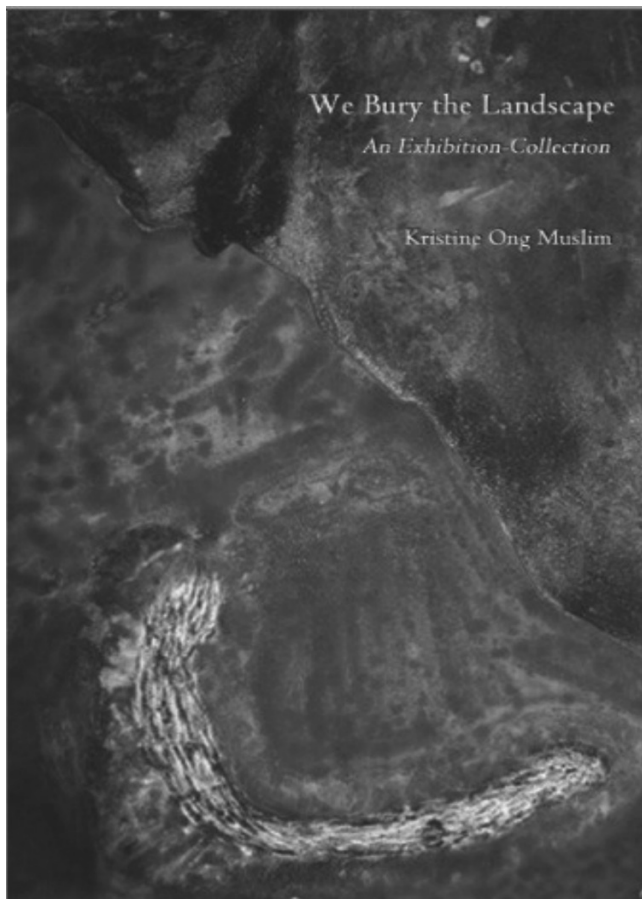
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